

Quebec Feminist Film Culture in the 21st Century: A Transnational Perspective

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Abstract

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This dissertation looks at the emergence of transnational feminist audio-visual practices in Quebec that endorse, develop, and promote approaches to gender-specific issues in the film industry and cinematic imaginaries within the geo-cultural and geo-political francophone space. Drawing on transnational feminism, on media ecology's environmental approach to media, and transnational approaches to film studies, each chapter examines the circumstances, networks, and infrastructures that enabled feminist film culture in Quebec within the larger context of global, and specifically francophone, media. In this study, I bring together disparate formations of feminist media cultures, activism in the film industry, and filmmaking practices, including online distribution and curation of video documentary and video-art, questions of female authorship, feature fiction films shown in A-list international film festivals, and diasporic filmmaking practices from postcolonial francophone subjects migrated to Quebec. My case studies demonstrate how these contemporary feminist media and filmmaking practices in Quebec are both situated within the genealogy of Quebec women's cinema from the late 1960s and 1970s, and also transcend their nationalist theoretical and political frameworks.

Chapter 1 explores the Montreal-based, feminist/queer artist-run centre Groupe Intervention Vidéo (GIV), and its use of media technology. I draw both on feminist approaches to media technology to illustrate GIV's use of video technologies since the 1970s as a way of doing feminist political work, and on feminist critiques of platform studies to assess how GIV adapts its working methods to streaming platforms. Chapter 2 examines contemporary configurations of Quebec women's cinema within international film festival circuits through the work of three filmmakers, Chloé Robichaud, Sophie Deraspes, and Geneviève Dulude-De Celles. I combine the concepts of *cinéma-monde* and feminist theorizations of women's cinema and female authorship to address Quebec transnational cinema from a gender-specific perspective. In Chapter 3, I critique hegemonic feminist film discourse in Quebec that universalized the category of "woman"

and aligned with the dominant narrative of national identity in Quebec, which denied its colonial past and essentialized Quebec society as white and francophone. Against this backdrop, I illustrate how the work of three diasporic francophone filmmakers in Quebec - Gentille M. Assih, Hejer Charf, and Maryanne Zéhil expands dominant understanding of women's cinema by foregrounding the gendered experience of immigrant subjects across various cinematic forms, including documentary, experimental films, and feature fiction.

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This dissertation was completed on the unceded Indigenous territories of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation, custodians of the lands and waters of Tiohtià:ke/Montreal. My work was conducted within settler colonial infrastructures and is accountable to the labour of Indigenous Peoples in decolonial practice.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation looks at the emergence of contemporary feminist audio-visual practices in Quebec that endorse, develop, and promote approaches to gender-specific issues in the film industry and cinematic imaginaries within the transnational space of the *francophonie*. Two main questions have prompted my research: what feminist discourses from Quebec circulate within the larger *francosphère*?¹ To what extent are transnational and intersectional perspectives integrated into women's cinema and feminist film culture in Quebec? I answer these questions by examining a variety of feminist discourses and audio-visual practices in Quebec, some aligned with neoliberal discourses of women's empowerment and gender equality, others trying to create alternative economies and affective social and cultural relations. I bring together disparate formations of feminist media cultures, activism in the film industry, and filmmaking practices, including online distribution and curation of video documentary and video-art, questions of female authorship, feature fiction films shown in A-list international film festivals, and diasporic filmmaking practices from postcolonial francophone subjects migrated to Quebec. My case studies demonstrate how these contemporary feminist media and filmmaking practices in Quebec are both entrenched within the genealogy of Quebec women's cinema from the late 1960s and 1970s and transcend this framework and its nationalist and political implications. This complex historical relationship belies the traditional feminist historiographical narrative of "waves," which portrays each "wave" as homogenous and self-contained, thus erasing the plurality of voices and positions.² I find Prudence Chamberlain's definition of feminist waves as "moments of intensities" (2017, 10) more productive. These moments are "formed through a set of contingencies, in which past, present and future touch one another within the moment of contemporary activism" (2017, 13), which more accurately describes the inter-generational exchanges present in Quebec feminist film cultures. I consider the intensity of contemporary feminist discourses and activism in the media industries in Quebec as responding to pressing demands of the present but situated in a longer genealogy of feminist activism and approaches to

¹ This term is defined later.

² In particular, second-wave feminism, that emerged in the 1960s within the context of the New Left in the USA and across the Global North, is now flattened out either as "liberal middle-class white feminism" or as "radical feminism"—a position that sees patriarchal gender relations as the universal primary form of oppression and that, in its political organization, is exclusionary (i.e. only biological women can participate in radical feminist spaces). Such canonization excludes the significant contributions of Black feminists and queers of colour, as well as the theorizations of Marxist and material feminism.

francophone film- and media- making.

I address the study of contemporary feminist film culture in Quebec from within the geo-cultural space of *francophonie*, using an expanded definition that addresses colonial histories, uneven power relations, and connections across national borders in the geopolitical and cultural francophone space. Since Charles Forsick and David Murphy's landmark edited collection, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction* (2003), French and Francophone studies across North America have worked to recognize the unidirectional and Western-centric epistemological positioning that previously characterized the field. Within this context, the new inclusive definition of "francophone" overcomes the binary division between metropolitan France and the rest of the francophone world and denotes "a complex network of French-speaking (or, in certain cases, partially French-speaking) regions, countries and communities which together form a Francophone space" (Lewis 2018, 89). Conventional francophone scholarship uses a graphic nomenclature established by Tétu which distinguishes *la francophonie*, with a small "f," to designate French-speaking countries, from *la Francophonie* with a capital F, to refer to official geopolitical institutions, mainly the OIF (*Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie*) that creates and manages political and economic relations among governments using French (quoted in Parker 2003, 91). This distinction is very important in this dissertation, because while I consider *francophonie* mostly a socio-linguistic reality, I also address the role that francophone cultural institutions, relying on the existing geopolitical francophone infrastructure, play in the establishment of circuits of film production, distribution, and exhibition. The existence of the francophone geo-cultural area is, of course, a colonial legacy of the French empire. Yet, the francophone space is also a reality comprised of different communities that create "a space of solidarity" (Parker 2003, 101), by sharing the French language. In this respect, the infrastructure of *f/Francophonie* enables the mobility of filmmakers and media practitioners and promotes collaboration between film archives, feminist organizations, and other film institutions that are central in the articulation of a linguistic and cultural specific transnational circuit of feminism.

The term *francosphère* aptly grasps this new understanding of the francophone space defined by both centralizing and univocal flows of culture and politics, and also postcolonial relationships. In 2012, Andrew Hussey, the editor of the newly founded journal *Francosphères*, explained that *francosphère* countered the hierarchical relationship between French and

Francophone, and stressed that the term can “interrogate the spheres of French influence across the globe” and “re-invest [the discipline of French Studies] with theoretical inflections derived from postcolonial theory or Cultural Studies” (Hussey 2012, 1). Understanding Quebec from the perspective of the *francosphère* helps explain the province’s troubled “postcolonial” position within the francophone area. While postcolonialism as a theoretical framework has barely caught on among analysis of Quebec cinema (and Quebec culture writ-large), the perception of a postcolonial condition in Quebec emerged during the Quiet Revolution in the late 60s and early 70s, a period of modernization and development of a national identity among leftist intellectuals. As explained by Quebec historian Marilyn Randall, following the publication of Albert Memmi’s *Portrait du colonisateur* in 1972, “young intellectuals of postwar Quebec [...] became convinced of the need for economic, cultural and political decolonization. In its most radical terms, this involved independence from the colonizer, a role which Canada (and American capitalism) had taken over from the British” (Randall 2003, 77).³ However, beyond this vision of the French-Canadians as an oppressed and colonized people, which is at the base of national identity and consequent nationalist claims, Quebec scholar Rachel Killick (2006) has illustrated that Quebec cannot be defined only in relation to Anglophone economic and linguistic dominance, but that it needs to take into account Quebec’s postcolonial position as an ex-colony of France and as a settler colonial society, as well as recent immigration. The relationships of exploitation and exclusion of Indigenous populations, and Quebec’s importance as a metropole especially for francophone immigration from the Caribbean, Africa, and the Middle East determine the possibility of considering Quebec as a postcolonial society. Yet, this debate, explored in a special issue of *Quebec Studies* (Desroches 2003, Nkunzimana 2003, Roberts 2003), is relevant only as far as it challenges dominant constructions of identity in Quebec. Feminist scholar Chantal Maillé has illustrated how a dominant narrative of national identity in Quebec, based on the myth of the two founding peoples, has glorified the European civilizing mission and has essentially racialized Quebec as white (2007, 96–97).⁴ This has also been a character of Quebec’s feminist movement,

³ French-Tunisian anti-colonial writer Albert Memmi had described the condition of French Canadians in terms of economic, cultural, and linguistic oppression from Anglophone, Canadian and American, domination (Randall 2003; Austin 2015, chapter 4).

⁴ According to Maillé: “le récit de la Conquête [...] a consacré la thèse des deux peuples fondateurs, diabolisé les peuples autochtones et glorifié l’action civilisatrice du colonisateur. [...] Bien que le Québec ait connu des vagues importantes d’immigration tout au long de son histoire, l’imaginaire québécois a peu intégré les actes de présence de ces très diverses communautés dans son autoreprésentations” (2007, 97). *La Conquête* refers to the conquest of New France in 1760 by the British regime.

which was shaped by Quebec's struggle for sovereignty (Maillé 2007, Lamoureux 2001).

Applying the awareness of the “binary-hierarchical past” of French and Francophone to the field of film studies, scholar Bill Marshall developed the concept of “francophone cinema” as a “category to apprehend the cinematic production and reception of French-speaking territories *as a whole*, most notably in the double sets of unevenness implied in those relations, due of course to the demographic and industrial weight of Hollywood and metropolitan France, and in the forms of adaptation found in local conditions” (Marshall 2012, 37). Responding to larger “remappings [...] in relation to the global and transnational turn in analysing film and in regard attempts to reassert French and other cultural nationalism” (Marshall 2012, 51), Marshall invited to consider the “cinema of the Francosphere” outside of centralizing constructions that see francophone cinema as “the other” both of metropolitan French cinema, and of mainstream commercial cinema (Hollywood) (Marshall 2012, 37). Moreover, for Marshall, “Francophone cinema is both part of a naturalised capital flow within globalisation and not part of it, emphasising artistic and personal connections. It is not determined by nation-building, in France, Quebec, or elsewhere, although it is in tension with it” (Marshall 2012, 51). Hence, drawing on Marshall, I embrace the use of the term francophone cinema as a device to consider and bring to light transnational connections, while at the same time signalling cultural and linguistic specific processes within globalization and the frictions with national(ist) preoccupations and definitions of borders. Reconceptualized as such, “francophone cinema” does not imply anymore a binary opposition to metropolitan French cinema. Instead, especially in the context of Quebec, it serves to recognize colonial legacies and fraught relationships within and across national borders that shape access to the circuits of film production and distribution. Consequently, it also reveals multilingualism, intercultural encounters, and the presence of postcolonial cinematic cultures. The framework of “francophone cinema” moves the study of Quebec cinema away from a predominant national paradigm and resituates it within a larger geopolitical framework that recognizes the material and discursive force of national borders, histories of inclusion and exclusions, and of uneven power relations within and across those borders.

By studying contemporary feminist discourses and approaches to filmmaking in Quebec from within the “francophonizing” perspective suggested by Marshall (2019, 262), this dissertation contributes not only to destabilize unilateral flows of feminist film culture from France to the “rest” of the francophonie and oppositions between Hollywood and Quebec cinema,

but also, and most importantly, to bring forward internal power dynamics within Quebec and the historical shortcomings of Quebec feminism. The framework of “francophone cinema” is apt for the study of feminist film culture in Quebec because it illuminates relational networks and regional flows of films and videos that address the dynamics of globalization from a distinct perspective and that have the potential to decentralize homogenizing and universalizing tendencies of global feminism.

Several cultural and political shifts have characterized the larger context of global feminist media in the last decades. Since the 1990s and the decline of the political feminist movements of the 1970s and 1980s, a postfeminist sensibility dominated mainstream ideas of feminism, media representations of female subjectivities, but also media culture and the attitudes of practitioners within the film and media industry. Postfeminism claimed optimistically that gender equality was achieved (McRobbie 2004, 255), and is characterized by a disavowal and a backlash of feminist politics (Gill and Scharff 2011; McRobbie 2008; Tasker and Negra 2005, 2007). It emphasizes individualism, choice, empowerment, and freedom within neoliberal capitalism. Many feminist film and media theorists have countered postfeminism’s feel-good narrative of girl power and illuminated the construction of normative neoliberal modes of femininity that celebrate white, middle-class, entrepreneurial, Western women in film and media (Tasker and Negra 2008; Rottenberg 2013). Similarly, scholars have rejected postfeminism’s idea that earlier feminist movements are worthless and documented the history and archives of 1970s’ feminist filmmaking and film culture (Juhasz 2001, 2006). The superficiality and falsity of postfeminism was illuminated with the #Me Too and the Time’s Up movements since 2017. While these movements reignited feminist activism and brought visibility to gender discrimination in the film and media industries, leading to policy changes, this “popular” display of feminist discourses in digital and broadcast media (2018, 1), Banet-Weiser writes, alerted us that “spectacular [...] celebrity feminism and corporate feminism” often obscures “expressions that critique patriarchal structures and systems of racism and violence” as well as a larger “feminist critique of structure” (2018, 4).

There has also been increased attention in the last two decades on feminist media within the context of “global media” more generally (Herman and McChesney 2003). The shifting landscapes of media technologies has considerably expanded the typologies and forms of women’s engagement in global visual culture (Baer 2016). These forms of feminist media and

women's participation exist within the context of advanced global capitalism and highly networked media environments, and demand close attention towards the ways in which women's audiovisual practices operate at the global/local interface of digital culture (Hedge 2011) and within the interconnected infrastructures and institutions of world cinema. For example, Alexandra Juhasz noted the "makers, viewers, programmers, distributors, and institutions that support a thriving contemporary feminist media community," such as the "feminists make mainstream narrative films and HBO documentaries, they run distribution companies and film festivals [...], they teach media-production skills to younger feminists, and they show their media work at festivals, college campuses, and on the internet" (Juhasz 2006, 53–54). Across these reconfigured borders and circuits of circulation, feminist media culture and women's cinema still carry the potential for social and political action (Marciniak, Imre, O' Healy 2007). By focusing on francophone inflections of contemporary feminist discourses and practices within Quebec film and media, my study responds to contemporary global(izing), often Anglo-centric, discourses in feminism and film.

This dissertation considers contemporary feminist media activism and approaches to filmmaking within the fraught histories of Quebec feminism and an established tradition of women's cinema, intended both as a practice and a discourse, based on universal and ahistorical understanding of gender difference and oppression. The practices under examination in this dissertation are currently reshaping mainstream, top-down, feminist discourses in the province and are providing gender-focused critiques of Quebec national culture and of larger global phenomena. I consider both material strategies of making feminist media, which include the labour of community building and of curation of the feminist audiovisual archive (as in the case of the media organization GIV analyzed in chapter 1), and formal approaches to filmmaking and strategies of professional agency by female filmmakers analyzed in chapter 2 and 3. Even when I focus on the study of filmmakers, I do not consider them as exceptional individuals, but I situate their work within networks and institutions of film production and distribution. Together, the case studies reflect on a contemporary feminist media ecology that is both the legacy of and at the same time departs from previous configurations of feminist film culture in the province, exceeding gender-specific analyses of oppression and inequality.

Literature review

This dissertation contributes to the study of Quebec cinema and, more broadly, to feminist

approaches to film studies from a transnational perspective.

Beyond general historical overviews and reference works of Quebec cinema, in English and French (Jean 1991; Lever 1995; Pallister 1995; Coulombe and Jean 2006), scholarship on Quebec cinema has mostly fallen under the rubric of national cinema, stressing its distinction from Canadian cinema and its potential to form collective narrative identities and communities (Marshall 2001, MacKenzie 2004, Poirier 2004).⁵ In *Quebec Cinema*, Bill Marshall provides a historical overview of the development of Quebec as a “national cinema” within the provincial infrastructures of production and proposes a flexible understanding of Quebec film texts as representative of national culture and identity. As I further illustrate in Chapter 2, Marshall theorizes Quebec films in terms of “national-allegorical tensions,” that are formed by and represent a fixed notion of national identity, but also are shaped by pluralized discourses of the nation, at the crossroad of various ideological discourses and aesthetic strategies, reflecting the “paradoxes inherent in the idea of the nation itself” (2001, 3). Against a definition of a national cinema as consisting of a stable set of political, thematic, and formal concerns, Marshall considers the variety of film texts within Quebec cinema as they address national culture and history and contribute to the formation of national identity. However, while drawing on Marshall’s flexible definition of national cinema, my case studies confront the “national” framework only as far as they are situated (or not) in the national infrastructures of cinematic production and distribution, and, at the level of filmic narrative, expand or challenge dominant constructions of national identity. Scott MacKenzie analyzes how the fringes of Quebec film culture in the 1960s represented the “Québécois experience” (1), and imagined “a new, egalitarian, and independent Quebecois society” (7). He described how left-wing nationalism informed the *cinéma direct* of Pierre Perrault, Michel Brault, Claude Jutra, and Gilles Groulx; the NFB’s program *Société Nouvelle* attempted to develop alternative publics; and film and video collectives developed other forms of independent cinema. Drawing on Habermas’ theorization of the public sphere and its re-elaborations especially by Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt (1993), Nancy Fraser (1992), and Miriam Hansen (1991), MacKenzie argues that Quebec cinema, in the wake of the Quiet Revolution, allowed “both audiences and filmmakers to imagine a new and egalitarian way of living and interacting, an imagined community that dissembled hierarchy and

⁵ In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I provide a review of recent scholarship that is explicitly applying a transnational framework to the study of Quebec cinema in the 21st century.

opened up debate and discourse within the public sphere” (2). In this respect, contemporary concepts of community and collectivity in feminist film culture in Quebec fit within MacKenzie’s genealogy of political film culture.

While studies of Quebec cinema often offer an overview of women’s cinema, they rarely take a feminist perspective and barely address the historical context of the feminist movement in Quebec. Bill Marshall, in his chapter “Women’s Cinema,” writes:

“Quebec women’s cinema, in the tensions between [...] gender and national self-affirmation and a broader provisionality and self-questioning, opens up a potential space for Quebec culture to [...] reject and undermine both linguistic and sexual positions of mastery and to develop new cinematic communities and spaces” (2001, 214).

Marshall recognizes how the particular, embodied circumstances in which women access filmmaking opens up “the possibility of alternative filmmaking practices” (208) that questions the universalism of masculinity. Yet, his analysis of women cinema, in line with the other chapters in his book, examines only the filmographies of several female feature film directors.

Beyond general histories and theorizations of Quebec cinema, this thesis is in conversation with feminist and gender-specific approaches to Quebec film history. Among French-language scholarship, two works are fundamental to theories of feminist women’s filmmaking practices and women in histories of Quebec cinema. The first is Louise Carrière’s *Femmes et cinéma québécois* (1983), which divides its analysis into two main sections: first, the place of women in the film industry and second, the analysis of representation of women on screen by both male and female filmmakers. Carrière’s book is also a valuable historical document because it provides a picture of feminist and film discourse in Quebec, including primary source works by media practitioners. The second is Jocelyne Denault’s *Dans l’ombre des projecteurs: les Québécoises et le cinéma* (1996), which gives a historical account of the contribution of women in different roles to Quebec cinema from 1896 (year of the first screening of the Lumière Cinematograph in Montreal) to 1969 (year of the first documentary feature made by a woman, *De mère en fille* by Anne-Claire Poirier). Based on extensive archival research, Denault provides an alternative historiography of Quebec cinema that, because of its focus on filmmakers, explores forms of female labour usually excluded from film histories.

While Québec’s feminist film and media production emerged out of the women’s

movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there has been limited French-language feminist film scholarship about Quebec. This is mainly because feminism and gender studies has only recently been recognized and institutionalized within francophone universities.⁶ This has been changing, and there are recent French-language feminist studies of Quebec cinema that have integrated queer and intersectional perspectives. Joëlle Rouleau's dissertation (2015) on representation of "differences" in a corpus of films from the 2010s takes an intersectional feminist perspective. Julie-Ravary Pilon's *Femmes, nation et nature dans le cinéma québécois*, instead, contributes to studies of gender and nation by deconstructing representations of female bodies as allegories of the Quebec nation in several films from the mid-1960s to the 2010s. Julia Minne's research-creation project about the history of the collective Videos-Femmes contributes to a feminist historiography of independent Quebec film and video history (2019). Finally, Karine Bertrand is exploring the specificities of Indigenous women's cinema in Quebec (2017, 2020a, 2020b). One very recent collection, *De l'exclusion à la solidarité. Regards intersectionnels sur les médias*, edited by Josette Brun, tackles "the complex way in which power relationships of gender and race intertwine in media, reproducing or challenging the norms that contribute to keep in place some forms of social inequality" (Brun 2020, 11).⁷ Embracing Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge's recent work, Brun intervenes in French-language feminist scholarship by applying intersectional theory to media studies in Quebec.⁸ According to Brun, such move is necessary "given the tensions across Quebec society, public sphere, and media

⁶ For example, the Institut de recherches et d'études féministes (IREF) was only created in 1990 at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). In the department of Film Studies and Art History at the Université de Montréal, a chair in Film and Gender Studies was opened only in 2018.

⁷ "[...] la façon complexe dont les rapports de pouvoir qui sont le genre et la race s'entrecroisent dans les médias, reproduisant ou défiant les normes contribuant au maintien de certaines formes d'inégalités sociales." (Author's translation).

⁸ Intersectional theory has its roots in the "A Black Feminist Statement Manifesto," in which the Combahee River Collective theorized the interlocking of race, sex, heterosexual and class oppression (1979) in response to the racism and the sexism that they encountered, respectively, within the women's liberation movement and the male-dominated Civil Rights movement in the USA. Building on Black feminist epistemologies, Law scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw has taken up "intersectionality" as a metaphor apt to describe the "structural, political, and representational aspects" that characterize violence against women of color on the basis of race and gender oppression (1991, 1244). Crenshaw demonstrated that sexism and racism, combined, perpetuate social inequalities that affect specifically women of color and marginalize them within political movements. More recently, against mainstream uses of the concept of intersectionality that focus only on identity rather than oppression, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins has defined "intersectionality" as a "critical social theory" grounded in the thought of Black feminism (2019). For Collins, intersectionality *metaphorically* describes social phenomena as interconnected, and *heuristically*, on the one hand, facilitates "the rethinking of [...] social problems such as violence, social institutions such as work and family, and important social constructs such as identity" (2019, 34) and brings "new system of power into view [incorporating] sexuality, ethnicity, age, ability, and nation as similar categories of analysis" (2019, 37).

especially in regards to the position of Muslim and Indigenous women” (2020, 20).⁹

There have been some important English-language interventions in the theorization of women’s cinema and feminist film practices in Quebec. In the foundational collection *Gendering the Nation: Canadian Women’s Cinema* (Armatage, Banning, Longfellow 1999), contributions by Harcourt, Nadeau, and Nicks about Canadian women’s cinema within international feminist film culture address the relations between gender and nation (Harcourt 1999; Nadeau 1999; Nicks 1999). In particular, Chantal Nadeau illustrates how since the 1970s, women filmmakers have played a crucial role within Quebec’s cinematic landscape through narratives and forms that have articulated a strong critique of nationalist rhetoric, drawing the attention to the intimate to affirm alternatives spaces and relations to the political sphere (Nadeau 1999). Nadeau, in previous French (1992) and English (1994) articles, examined how Quebec cinema has dismissed sexual difference and has constructed an imaginary in which subject positions are essentially and inherently masculine. Brenda Longfellow also specifically tackled women’s cinema in Quebec from within a feminist perspective (1989). In her recent overview of “ciné-feminism” in Quebec (Longfellow 2019), Longfellow provides a detailed account of the historical and cultural context of Quebec feminism within which feminist approaches to filmmaking emerged in the province. Retracing different practices, from documentary filmmaking at the National Film Board and independent fiction feature filmmaking, Longfellow illustrates the persistence of “political feminist modernism” across various sites of contemporary ciné-feminism: the author cinema of Léa Pool, the web-series *Féminin/ Féminin* (Chloé Robichaud 2014–16), and the Indigenous collective Arnait Video Production. Ful Massimi has also broadened the study of Quebec cinema from a queer feminist perspective, bringing out the connections between manhood and nationhood embedded in cinematic constructions of Quebec national identity. Massimi analyses the work of queer filmmakers Xavier Dolan and Lea Pool, who “recenter female, queer, and maternal figures in the national master-narratives [of Quebec]” (2018, 133).

In this dissertation, I consider contemporary feminist media activism and approaches to filmmaking within the specific cultural-historical context of Quebec feminism. In this respect, the work of sociologist Diane Lamoureux is crucial to understand how feminist politics developed in

⁹ “étant donné ... les tensions qui traversent la société, l’espace public et les medias québécois notamment à l’endroit des femmes musulmanes et autochtones.” (Author’s translation). Trans sociologist Alexandre Baril has noted that, notwithstanding the recent intersectional turn in francophone feminism, “generally speaking trans issues are systematically ignored in francophone feminist works otherwise concerned with including *all* women, as they so often remind us” (2016, 44).

the province. According to Lamoureux in *L'amère patrie: féminisme et nationalisme*, feminist politics, emerged within the context of Quebec's struggle for sovereignty, were fast assimilated and institutionalised within political State structures. This institutionalization has in turn led to a mainstream view of feminism as a social movement and not as a larger intellectual and political endeavour that deconstructs the social category "women" and with it heteronormativity and established power relations on the basis of sex and gender, race, and class (Lamoureux 2001, chapter 7).¹⁰ Therefore, the feminist movement was characterized by two limitations, as further developed by Chantal Maillé. First, it endorsed the political narrative of national oppression (Maillé 2007, 98). The Front de libération des femmes du Québec (FLF), a far-left political faction in the 1960s,¹¹ embraced the analogy that equated Quebec's national oppression with slavery in the United States. Women in the FLF notoriously saw themselves as "slaves of the slaves."¹² The second shortcoming was the propensity to universalize women's condition and oppression (Maillé 2007, 96). Quebec feminism was dominated by French feminism's discourse of universalism, which did not see differences amongst women, but only "an essential difference between women and men that is constitutive of a '*nous les femmes*' identity" (Maillé 2012, 70). Therefore, there was a delayed analysis of oppression based on "race, class, and difference," rather than only gender oppression (Maillé 2012, 69). In response, Maillé argues for the integration of postcolonial approaches to deconstruct such narratives. These sociological and historical approaches, based on postcolonial, intersectional, and transnational theories, have rarely been taken into account in studies of francophone Quebec cinema, women's cinema, and feminist media practice in this province.

Against this socio-historical backdrop, throughout the years, new forms and practices of feminist activism have arisen, which feminist scholars have attempted to systematize using the wave analogy. In francophone feminist academic discourse in Quebec, Maria Nengeh Mensah first defined "une troisième vague du féminisme" (a third-wave feminism) adapting US-based theories and practices to the context of Quebec. According to Mensah, third-wave feminism in

¹⁰ Lamoureux detailed how the feminist movement in Quebec was quickly assimilated and institutionalised within political State structures, first with laws that would implement women's rights, and then with an increasing inclusion of women within official politics (2001, chapter 6). For Lamoureux, this situation subsumes the feminist movement to governmentality and has impeded the affirmation of a "culture politique de la rébellion" (rebellious political culture) (2001, chapter 7).

¹¹ Maillé describes the FLF as "the most leftist political faction of Quebec feminism in the 1960s" (Maillé 2012, 67)

¹² In 1970, the FLF wrote the manifesto "Nous nous définissons comme esclaves des esclaves" in which women's liberation was theorized within national liberation.

Quebec must be thought more as “une piste de réflexion quant à la nature des changements qui affectent le féminisme” (Mensah 2005) than as an individualistic mode of militancy based on consumerist choices. Drawing on poststructuralist theories that have questioned the category of “woman” as a unified subject (Butler 1990, Braidotti 2011) as well as on critiques by women of colour to liberal feminism (hooks 1981, Lorde 1984), Mensah argues that third-wave writings “are charged by a desire to articulate sexual difference and difference between women and feminists in order to produce new understandings of women’s and girl’s power, sexuality and social change” (Mensah 2005, section *Ruptures ou continuité?*).¹³ In Quebec, at a sociological level, this is translated in a renewed form of activism practiced especially through digital media where “Quebec women build a discourse centered on the [feminist] achievements of the past and therefore on the need to redirect action strategies in order to pursue a radicalized struggle directed against patriarchy, capitalism, and racism” (Mensah 2005, section *Ruptures ou continuité?*).¹⁴ Similarly in their edited collection *Remous, réssacs, et dérivations autour de la troisième vague féministe*, Mercédès Baillergeon and the collective les Déferlantes, against accusations of feminist depoliticisation, argue that “third-wave feminists do not evade socio-political issues, but their political commitment does not fit within the traditional route.” (2011, 15).¹⁵ Baillergeon and les Déferlantes defend the terminology “third wave feminism” to stress that “feminism, as a social movement, has transformed according to broader technological, cultural, political, social and economic shifts” (2011, 12).¹⁶ These debates about the existence of a third- (and, more recently, fourth-) feminist wave in Quebec are useful in the context of this dissertation as far as they signal novel feminist approaches to filmmaking and media practices that, explicitly or implicitly, respond to, confront, and expand not only cine-feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, but also dominant socio-political and theoretical feminist discourses in Quebec mostly aligned with and contained within state institutions.

¹³ “Les écrits portant sur le féminisme de la troisième vague [...] sont investis d’un désir d’articuler la différence sexuelle et la différence entre femmes et féministes afin de produire une nouvelle compréhension du pouvoir des femmes et des filles, de la sexualité et du changement social” (Author’s translation).

¹⁴ “Les Québécoises tiennent un discours axe sur les acquis du passé et donc sur le besoin de réorienter les stratégies d’action afin de poursuivre une lutte radicalisée dirigée vers patriarcat, capitalisme, et racisme.”

¹⁵ “Les féministes de la troisième vague n’évacuent pas les questions sociopolitiques, mais leur engagement politique ne cadre pas avec le parcours traditionnel.” (Author’s translation).

¹⁶ “Le féminisme en tant que mouvement sociale s’est lui aussi modifié au rythme de ces changements technologiques, culturels, politiques, sociaux et économiques, de façon à répondre à des problématiques émergentes.” (Author’s translation).

Theoretical Framework

In each chapter of this dissertation, I define specific theoretical concepts from media theory (such as remediation), feminist film theory (female authorship and women's cinema), and transnational film studies (minor cinema and minor transnationalism) that I apply to the case studies considered. In this section of the introduction, however, I sketch the theoretical frameworks that have oriented my methodology and constitute the overarching foundations of the research that I conducted.

First, in terms of feminist theory, I combine two main interrelated epistemological frameworks: the feminist theory of embodiment and transnational feminism. Rosi Braidotti's (2011) theory of embodiment places the body and the lived experience of female gendered subjects at the center of the philosophical enquiry on subjectivity. For Braidotti the "starting ground for feminist redefinitions of female subjectivity is a new form of materialism that places emphasis on the embodied and therefore sexually differentiated structure of the speaking subject" (2011, 128). In this account, the body is given a primary role in defining subjectivity, which is questioned and rejected as pure consciousness. In this respect, the "sexually differentiated structure of the speaking subject" must not be understood in essentializing terms, but as a "politics of location" (Rich 1984), a way to ground subjects' experience in their socio-cultural positions and thus moving away from a hegemonic feminism that universalizes all women's experiences. Adrienne Rich's concept of a politics of location responded to the work of women of color in the late 1970s and early 1980s that challenged white universalizing feminist positions, such as "A Black Feminist Statement" by the Combahee River Collective (1977); and the collection *This Bridge Called My Back* edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa ([1981] 2015). As summarized by Teresa de Lauretis, together these writings "prompted a shift in feminist consciousness" because of their "effort to work through feminism's complicity with ideology, both ideology in general (including classism or bourgeois liberalism, racism, colonialism, imperialism and [...] the ideology of gender in particular—that is to say, heterosexism" (1987, 10–11). Understood in relation to this genealogy, a feminist theory of embodiment in film and media studies serves to assert discursive agency of female subjects rooted in their experience, considering gendered structures and socio-cultural discourses that inform their access to and engagement with global film- and media- making. Building on the concept of the politics of location, I also draw on the theoretical framework of transnational

feminism, which is a theoretical practice and a project of social justice in the context of globalization that resists the construction of “woman” as an essentialized category based on the idea of common oppression. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan write that transnational feminism “articulate[s] the relationship of gender to scattered hegemonies such as global economic structures, patriarchal nationalisms, ‘authentic’ forms of tradition, religious fundamentalism, local structures of domination, and legal-judicial oppression on multiple levels” (1994, 17). By emphasizing and recognizing difference among women, transnational feminism rejects “global feminism” and its universalizing Western-centric model of women’s liberation intertwined with the project of progressive modernity. Transnational feminism has also revealed the role that Western imperialism plays in the production of knowledge. In this respect, the work of Chandra Talpade Mohanty is crucial. She first revealed how Western-based feminist scholarship is imbricated in geopolitical relations of power and has constructed a monolithic image of “Third World woman” (1983). She later argued for a “feminism without borders,” an approach that “is attentive to borders while learning to transcend them” (Mohanty 2003, 2). According to Mohanty’s vision of transnational feminism, borders (in terms of nation, class, and race) are constitutive of gender formations and struggles, but they are not to be considered as essentializing. Transnational feminism, thus, considers the historical formation and effect of borders that have produced specific, diverse, and unequal relationships among different regions and groups of people. As such, in the context of my research, transnational feminism is a framework apt to illuminate geopolitical production and circulation patterns in the study of cultural texts and knowledge in francophone feminism because, as analyzed by Chantal Maillé, within the francophonie, feminists “have not criticized [the ways in which [Francophonie] presents itself as a positive universalism, as a race-blind community of knowledge” (2012, 75).¹⁷ These two theories have allowed me to consider the material conditions of existence of women’s cultural formations and productions and their entanglement in technological and institutional infrastructures, while addressing Quebec’s cultural specificity within the *francosphère* and bringing forward (post)colonial dynamics that have shaped feminist film culture in the province.

¹⁷ More recently, within the field of French and Francophone Studies, Julien Souaudeau and Mame-Fatou Niang have explicitly deconstructed classical French universalism in the wake of anti-racist and decolonial movements in France (2022). They demonstrate that universalism emerged within the context of European colonialism as a concept to justify imperialism and write: “[l’universalisme] est une idéologie de l’universel au service de la supériorité européenne. Le nier [...] c’est pérenniser la colonialité dans le monde postcolonial” (2022, 18).

Relating those two feminist frameworks—materiality and transnationalism—to film studies shapes my approach. First, I consider the material conditions, the technological infrastructures, and the national and transnational institutions that allow for the production and circulation of films made by women in Quebec, paying attention to the power relations embedded within media economies. Indeed, while I delve into detailed textual analysis of film texts, I also consider the materiality of the conditions of production and circulation. I rely on media ecology’s environmental approach to media, which defines media not only as means of communication, but as environments made up of several networked actors—including the technologies themselves and the social practices around them (Strate 2017). The field of media ecology demonstrates how media technology shapes culture and how cultural practices redefine uses of media technology, which move away from representation and textual analysis to provide a more holistic understanding of media within their political economy of social and cultural relations (Parikka 2011, Taffel 2019). This understanding of media as *milieux* of interconnected people, practices, and content is particularly apt to describe the context of global media (Baltruschat 2010), where the synergy between film production, distribution and exhibition shape the development of content and the formation of specific circuits of film circulation. Drawing on such materialist understanding of media provided by the field of media ecology, throughout this dissertation, I focus on the networks encompassing practitioners, audiences, and technologies within a transnational feminist film culture.

The last theoretical foundation of the present research is the conceptualization of “transnational cinema” in film studies. In this dissertation, I deploy “transnational” as an umbrella term that allows me to regroup disparate filmmaking practices, circulation of films, and film narratives that disrupt national culture, both within the specialized circuits of grassroots media than in the circuits of global art cinema and in the interstitial modes of production of diasporic postcolonial filmmakers. Katarzyna Marciniak, Anikó Imre, and Áine O’Healy combine transnational feminism and transnational media studies in their collection *Transnational Feminism in Film and Media*, and consider films that “aspire to construct an explicitly counter-hegemonic or even feminist mode of address” (2007, 9–10), which informed my choice of case studies. The concept of the transnational emerged in film studies as part of a broader “spatial turn” in the humanities that addresses geopolitical scales in the production and circulation of cultural texts and knowledge (Newman 2010, 5). Given the context of advanced global

capitalism, the concept of the transnational has established itself as a critical tool that takes into account cinema's "global circulation" and the ways in which globalization is inscribed within aesthetics and narratives of films (Ezra and Rowden 2006, 1). Moreover, describing "the global forces that link people or institutions across nations" (Ezra and Rowden 2006, 1), the term transnational also inherently gestures toward overcoming the containment of national and nation-states' borders, while recognizing and addressing the material and ideological regulatory functions of such borders. As explained by Nataša Durovicová, "in contrast to 'global' and 'international,' the term transnational acknowledges the persistent agency of the state [...]. At the same time, the prefix 'trans-' implies relations of unevenness and mobility" (2009, X). Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim have explained the difference between the terms "globalization", which generally describes "every process or relationship [...] that crosses national boundaries" (2010, 12) and "transnational," which pays attention "to the impacts that such exchanges have at a local level" and to their "effects within and beyond the nation-state" (2010, 12). Understood as such, transnational comes to define "modes of film production that transcend national borders and bring into question the fixity of national cultural discourses" (Higbee and Lim 2012, 11). However, Higbee and Lim who caution against generalizing national historical and cultural specificities. Hence, I follow their invite to adopt a "critical transnationalism" that interrogates how

"film-making activities negotiate with the national on all levels- from cultural policy to financial sources, from the multiculturalism of difference to how it reconfigures the nation's image of itself. It is attentive to questions of postcoloniality, politics and power, and [...] new forms of neocolonialist practices" (Higbee and Lim 2012, 18).

Methodology

A focus on circulation informs my methodology, determining both the selection of case studies and the way I approach them. In each chapter, I look at different aspects of Quebec feminist film culture that signal transnational connections within the geocultural space of francophonie. My approach follows film scholar Kathleen McHugh's call for both "an understanding of women's contributions to the cinema [able to encompass] a more structural and comprehensive analysis of production" and "an engagement with the impact of audiences and social movements on the

character of the industry and its products” (2009, 114). Following McHugh, my research treats women’s cinema and other feminist media practices as social-material assemblage. Therefore, my analysis has concerned technological, institutional, and organizational infrastructures and relational networks in an attempt to demonstrate how feminist film and media practices create connections between the aesthetics and the politics of everyday life in Quebec, addressing their local/global interface, their cultural specificities, and the historical and sociopolitical contexts in which they are rooted.

I combine archival research, semi-structured interviews, and textual analysis of videos and films to produce qualitative research on contemporary feminist film culture in Quebec. Together these methods allow me to illuminate representational and infrastructural concerns in my examination of contemporary feminist film culture. In each chapter, a discussion of the discourses and the material contexts that frame the production and the circulation of texts precede the detailed textual analysis of video programs and films. That said, each chapter relies on different, and independent, primary source research.

My semi-structured interviews and participant observation follow strict ethical guidelines and is aimed at understanding the mechanisms of film and media industries in relation to gender dynamics. It received a Certificate of Ethical Acceptability for Research Involving Human Subjects by Concordia Human Research Ethics Committee in November 2019. I have officially conducted several interviews with the members of the organization Groupe Intervention Vidéo—the object of study of the first chapter—and three interviews with the filmmakers whose work I analyze in the third chapter. Within feminist film and media studies, interviews are a preferred collaborative method to gain deeper understanding of the complex social, cultural and political forces that shape women’s experiences in film and media industries, and to validate personal experience in feminist struggles. For example, Alexandra Juhasz adopts a “process-oriented, interview-based documentary method” to reconstitute the institutional, educational, and technological infrastructures that have sustained formation of the alternative context of feminist media (2001, 2). More recently, Juhasz has also discussed interviewing as a collaborative method that requires a safe environment of exchange between the researcher and the participant “bridging across and building from difference within a shared space of [...] mutual co-design” (Aguayo and Juhasz2019, 1). In the context of my research, co-participative ethnography, mostly based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews, has served to address two main separate

concerns: in the case of my research with GIV, my formal and informal conversations with the members of this organization have allowed me to understand GIV's working methods, based on feminist ethos and politics, in the curation of streaming platforms; in the case of my research on diasporic francophone female filmmakers, interviews provide the testimony and viewpoints of the filmmakers themselves, traditionally excluded in feminist discussion of Quebec women's cinema.

For my research on the feminist organization Groupe Intervention Vidéo (GIV) (chapter 1), I initially drew on ethnographic participation and digital ethnographic observation to gather information, attending screenings and art events organized by GIV, following their activities on social media, and informally discussing with the members of GIV. Following an initial informal in-person conversation in 2019 with Petunia Alves (GIV's current director) and Liliana Nunez (responsible for distribution), I conducted written interviews by email or spoke on Zoom. Moreover, to reconstruct the history of GIV in the context of Quebec video history, I consulted primary sources—such as exhibition catalogues, feminist journals, and mainstream magazines—available at the Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec. Finally, GIV members directly sent to me digitized versions of various ephemera—such as programs, flyers, images, and reports of grant applications. For the research on a new generation of female filmmakers from Quebec successful in the circuit of A-list film festivals (chapter 2), I consulted primary sources at the archives of the Cinémathèque Québécoise. I conducted discourse analysis of published interviews with the filmmakers in various film magazines. I also looked more broadly, at the reception of their work in mainstream journals based in Quebec and in France (where their films circulated primarily). Moreover, I conducted textual analysis of the films drawing on concepts of queer and feminist theory. Finally, for my research conducted on diasporic francophone female filmmakers (chapter 3), I relied heavily on interviews with the filmmakers, both on Zoom and, after 2022, in person. Other sources, primary and secondary, were limited, including their films, which are not widely available. Luckily, I was able to watch some on DVD at the Médiathèque at the Cinémathèque Québécoise, which informed and assisted my close analysis of their work.

Chapter breakdown

Each chapter of this dissertation situates an aspect of Quebec's feminist media practice and women's cinema in the 21st century within the longer genealogy of feminist media and feminist

movements. In this thesis, I illustrate to what extent contemporary configurations of cine-feminism depart from hegemonic feminist frameworks in Quebec and how they critique dominant national narratives, spaces, and temporalities. I examine case studies situated in connection with historical feminist struggles, formal strategies, and interventions in the public sphere and rearticulated through transnational and intersectional perspectives.

Chapter 1 explores the Montreal-based, feminist/queer artist-run centre Groupe Intervention Vidéo (GIV) and positions their work as crucial to the development of transnational francophone feminism. GIV is dedicated to “promotion of videos created by women (in its most inclusive definition) by distributing and presenting them” (GIV, “Home”). In the chapter, I historically situate GIV within both the feminist social movement and alternative media culture in Quebec since the 1970s. I also stress the tension between GIV’s local commitments and transnational distribution. Locally, GIV is devoted to community-building through screening events of curated video-programs. Globally, the centre uses streaming platforms to exhibit their works in worldwide networks. I draw on feminist approaches to media technology to illustrate GIV’s use of video technologies since the 1970s as a way of doing feminist political work and on feminist critiques of platform studies to assess how GIV adapts its working methods to streaming platforms. At the end of the chapter, I provide textual analysis of some of GIV’s curated video programs and the video documentaries produced by GIV that demonstrate the integration of postcolonial and transnational feminist perspectives within the organization.

Chapter 2 examines contemporary configurations of Quebec women’s cinema within international film festival circuits through the work of three filmmakers, Chloé Robichaud, Sophie Deraspes, and Geneviève Dulude-De Celles. I combine the concepts of *cinéma-monde* and feminist theorizations of women’s cinema and female authorship to address Quebec transnational cinema from a gender-specific perspective. I define these filmmakers’ authorial status both in terms of their extra-textual strategies of professional affirmation and agency, and of aesthetic motifs recurring in their films that identify their feminist perspective. First, I situate the filmmakers’ professional efforts within the gender inequalities of the film industry of in Quebec, relying on the work of the organization *Réalisatrices Équitables*, which lobbies to raise awareness regarding gender inequities in the film industry and to facilitate women’s access to filmmaking. For each filmmaker, I do a thorough examination of one of their internationally successful films.

Chapter 3 looks at the work of three diasporic francophone filmmakers in Quebec - Gentile M. Assih, Hejer Charf, and Maryanne Zéhil - as another instance of transnational women's cinema. Their work, I argue, is an example of "minor transnationalism" (Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shi, 2005), because their films exceed conventional flows of circulation within the francosphere and expand dominant configurations of gender, race, and ethnicity in Quebec cinema. In this chapter, I critique feminist film discourse in Quebec that has universalized the category of "woman" and aligned with the dominant narrative of national identity in Quebec, which denied its colonial past and essentialized Quebec society as white and francophone. I also argue the immigrant female filmmakers' work is a response to dominant, ideas of Canadian multiculturalism and interculturalism at the provincial level of Quebec. The work of Assih, Charf, and Zéhil thus expands dominant understanding of women's cinema in Quebec in two ways. First, I assess the marginal position of these filmmakers within established circuits of feminist film culture in the province, while describing the larger transnational circuits that enable their access to filmmaking. Second, I analyze how their films foreground the gendered experience of immigrant subjects across various cinematic forms, including documentary, experimental films, and feature fiction.

CHAPTER 1

Emergent Distribution Strategies and Feminist Media Practices: The Case of *Groupe Intervention Vidéo* (GIV)¹

In Winter 2022, after two years of strict COVID regulations that prevented any in-person, indoor cultural events in Montreal, Groupe Intervention Vidéo (GIV), a feminist/queer artist-run center, resumed screenings at its headquarters. One of the first events was a special edition of *Topovidéographie*, a screening series where “artists and curators are invited to create a program focusing on issues of geography, territory and identity” (GIV, “Diffusion/Exhibition”). Dianne Heffernan was the invited curator. She, with Suzanne Vertu, co-founded in Montreal the separatist lesbian video collective Réseau Vidé-Elles in 1975. She has since relocated to Quebec City. At the screening, she showed *L'émergence de la culture Lesbienne à travers le militantisme* (Réseau Vidé-Elles, [1980?]) et *Carnet de Bar* (Réseau Vidé-Elles, 1986), two videos that are emblematic of the collective’s use of video technology to document the lives and activities of lesbian communities in Québec and Canada. Most of the audience were lesbian cis-women of different generations, whose reactions reflected anthropological as well as the cultural changes occurred in more than forty years of queer discourse and activism among women in Quebec. The video *Carnet de bar* showed scenes of lesbian bars’ culture in Montreal from the 1980s. This generated a palpably affective response across different age segments of the spectators. During the screening, the elder members of the audience responded with cheerful delight, screaming names out loud when they recognized themselves and their friends on screen kissing, drinking, dancing, or participating in theatrical performances or musical concerts. The screening was

¹ This chapter comprises work presented at the 6th annual conference organized by the *Le laboratoire/art et société/terrains et théories* (l/as/tt) in March 2019 in Montreal; and at the XXV International Conference of Film Studies at University Roma Tre in Italy later in November that same year. I then presented my methodological concerns of my research on GIV (notably: an “ethnographic” method based on semi-structured interviews, my connections to GIV’s members, and my attendance to some of the events organized by GIV in order to reconstruct the history of this centre and understand its role within the context of feminist media in Quebec; the suitability of a feminist transnational theoretical framework to study GIV) at the workshop *Methods in Progress* organized by Professor Ishita Tiwary at the GEM Lab in January 2020. Integrating substantial feedback received at these public presentations, I developed my Specialization Exam in October 2020. Part of the writing in this chapter was published in a peer-review article in the journal *Feminist Media Studies* (2022). Moreover, I conducted research on GIV with Professor Alanna Thain at McGill. The result of that research was published in the chapter titled “*Vidéo de Femmes dans le Parc: Feminist Rhythms and Festival Times Under Covid*” within the collection *Rethinking Film Festivals in Pandemic Times and After* edited by Antoine Damians and Marijke de Valck. Finally, I also conducted research on GIV within the context of Professor Rosanna Maule’s SSHRC-funded project “Women’s Films and Videos Organizations.”

followed by Q and A with Heffernan, moderated by actress and lesbian activist Gina Bergeron. Younger audience members lamented the lack of visibility of lesbian experience and the shifting politics of lesbianism, while the elder ones expressed nostalgia for non-mixed lesbian bars as spaces crucial for identity formation and political organization. Responding to the younger audience members, the discussion turned to two pressing concerns: first, how to foster connections and political exchanges between different generations of lesbians; second, what the best practices to preserve and make accessible the videos produced by Réseau Vidé-Elles are, given that these videos were originally conceived to be screened only within lesbian safe spaces. These reactions to the screening embody the typical exhibition model of activist media organizations that believe in the value of collective watching of films and videos to engender debates and eventually social change.

As a feminist media organization, GIV plays a crucial role in preserving the legacy of feminist media culture in Quebec and the history of the feminist movement. GIV also reshapes feminist discourse in Quebec toward transnational and intersectional perspectives by organizing dissemination programs and pedagogical activities, fostering artistic practices and uses of its collection, and maintaining distribution infrastructure that supports and grants visibility to women audiovisual artists through the endorsement of digital technology. Since the 1970s, GIV's catalogue has gradually included a broad variety of documentary and experimental videos that provide perspectives on women's movements from different generations and cultures. Today, GIV supports and fosters self-identified women's media work globally through continuous engagement with the local community of feminist and queer artists and publics, and through strategies of online distribution, operating in-between grassroots modes of organization and the system of municipal, provincial, and federal funding.²

GIV serves as a crucial actor for the circulation of feminist video work at different scales. I am interested in exploring and navigating the tension between GIV's local dimension in Quebec and its transnational reach. The history of this organization is very much embedded in the history and the discourse of francophone feminism in Quebec, even if GIV has always fostered

² GIV receives funding from the Conseil des Arts de Montreal, Conseil des Arts et des Lettres Québec, and Canada Council for the Arts.

international exchanges with other feminist media centres and organizations.³ Within and through GIV's mandate, collection, and activities, it is possible to tackle divergent yet co-existing discourses of "francophonie" in Quebec from a feminist-specific viewpoint: one that historically features an understanding of Quebec national condition and identity as postcolonial, and one associated with a transnational perspective that recognizes the heterogeneous feminist issues across French-speaking cultures and areas. Throughout the years, GIV has been crucial in pushing the boundaries of francophone feminist discourse beyond a narrow national focus and has fostered transnational approaches to feminist videomaking.

GIV promotes and showcases contemporary feminist and queer video-art, and also activates the memory of Quebec feminist histories through the consistent dissemination of video programs that put in conversation video works from different periods. These activities of curation and dissemination take place principally through in-person screenings at GIV's headquarters or in other venues in Montreal; at international film festivals with works from GIV's catalogue; and, since 2015, they have been implemented on streaming platforms. It is precisely GIV's use of and discourse on streaming technology that will constitute the main angle through which this chapter champions GIV as an exemplary case study to address transnational feminist approaches stemming from Quebec.

In particular, I will situate GIV's use of streaming platforms within GIV's own understanding of technology within its feminist praxis. GIV is a media center that invests in the use of media technology to address social and political issues, producing transformations in feminist cultural memory, as well as in circuits of production and distribution. GIV's understanding and use of media technology—from portable video technology to digital media—as a crucial method of intervention in the alternative public sphere has always been central to its production and distribution practices. Throughout these technological shifts, GIV maintains collaborative and feminist approaches to technology and infrastructures, foregrounding aspects of

³ In particular, my residency at the archive Centre Audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir in Paris in 2019 has confirmed a privileged circuit of exchanges between Quebec and France within francophone feminism, as demonstrated by mail correspondence between GIV and CASdB, festival catalogues, and the preservation of the NFB-produced documentary *Some American Feminists* (Luce Guilbeault, Nicole Brossard, and Margaret Wescott 1977) at the CASdB. However, GIV has, at least since the 1980s, also established international collaborations with feminist centers beyond francophone and Global North circuits, in particular creating meaningful exchanges with Latin American artists.

social reproduction: central to GIV's activities of curation and dissemination of feminist and queer video-art and documentaries are the social needs of its community of artists and public and a commitment to undergirding transnational feminist perspectives and anti-heteronormative affective relations.

Relying on interviews with GIV members and extensive primary research, in this chapter I will first contextualize GIV within Quebec video practices since the early 1970s and Quebec feminist history. Then, I will situate GIV's distribution strategies through streaming platforms within a broader streaming ecology and feminist use of digital media. I will then examine the methods undergirding GIV's streaming platforms, drawing on feminist approaches to platform studies. Finally, I will illustrate how the works GIV exhibits on these streaming platforms expand the meaning of Quebec feminism, encapsulating a plurality and variety of feminist issues and positions. I contend that on its streaming platforms, GIV curates the history of feminist approaches to video-making and reframes Quebec feminist video history from a transnational perspective.

Groupe Intervention Vidéo: Political Engagement through Video Distribution

Groupe Intervention Vidéo is an independent distributor “dedicated to the promotion of videos created by women (in its most inclusive definition) by distributing and presenting them” (GIV, “Home”). It establishes a non-exclusive partnership with “artists from different generations, origins, and communities whose works bear witness to the ongoing multifaceted social, technological, and artistic transformations and the continuous redefinition of our identities” (Alves, Nunez, Sedano 2020). This means that the artist retains the copyright on their work, while GIV focuses on circulation and the promotion of their work at screening events, film festivals, online curated programs, and on its website and its streaming platforms. Founded as an alternative media center, now a documentary and video-art distributor, GIV has played crucial role in shaping the feminist media landscape in Quebec from the 1970s through the present.⁴ This role is reflected in GIV's extensive and varied video collection (around 1,260 titles by 330 artists) that traces the history of Quebec feminism and activist video practice over forty years. In this

⁴ Within media studies, alternative media are usually defined as forms of media that are counter-hegemonic, deliberately situated in opposition to dominant mass media in order to educate and mobilise publics in regards to political causes (Downing 2001; Hamilton 2000; Gunnarson Payne 2012). I consider the media produced and distributed by GIV as activist as far as they have played a central role in the dissemination of feminist and queer politics, history and theory.

section, I provide a detailed account of GIV's history within the context of Quebec video history and Quebec feminism, as well as a broad overview of the activities of dissemination and exhibition organized by GIV, which currently constitute the main component of this organization's mandate.

Founded in 1975 by a group of activist video-makers interested in using the new technology of portable video to serve Montreal working-class communities (Winand 2022), GIV gradually shifted its organizational structure to become a women-ran center focused on the production and distribution of videos by women, for women. The founding members of GIV included H  l  ne Bourgault, Bernard   mond, Louise Gendron, Michel S  n  cal, and Michel Van De Walle, who were close to Marxist political circles. Initially, as a mixed group, GIV's primary mandate in the 1970s was to disseminate videos that documented working class struggles that would be used as a starting point for political organization.⁵ They approached videos as a means to analyze and disseminate information about social struggles and train political groups on how to use video technology. In an essay published in 1980, GIV's directors Diane Poitras and Roselyne Landry articulate the group's feminist political engagement and approach to video-making, but confirm their deliberate choice to operate in a mixed group: "La vid  ographie   tant pour le GIV un outil de transformation sociale, nos vid  ogrammes et nos d  marches agiront sur les rapports homme-femme    partir d'un lieu mixte" (110).⁶ GIV became a women's collective after the male founders moved to more professional circuits of media production, leaving the women to carry the labour of social organizing. Today, GIV exclusively distributes women's videos—defining "women" in a non-essentialist way grounded in trans-inclusive politics. GIV maintains a constant reflection on the definition of its mandate, its feminist politics, and the community of artists and publics that it intends to accommodate (Winand 2022).

⁵ As we can read in one of the first catalogues of GIV, quoted in the exhibition's catalogue, "Vid  o du Qu  bec" curated by Andr  e Duchaine in 1982 at the Contemporary Art Museum of Montreal: Le GIV a   t   mis sur pied par des r  alisateurs en vid  o, au printemps 1975. Ceux-ci avaient pour objectif premier de rendre accessible et de diffuser le plus largement possible des productions vid  ographiques progressistes r  alis  es au Qu  bec et    l'  tranger. Ces vid  ogrammes, pour la plupart, ont   t   produits pour soutenir et populariser les luttes ouvri  res et populaires. Ces documents peuvent donc servir comme outils de travail, d'analyse ou de formation pour les groupes engag  s dans la lutte contre l'exploitation capitaliste de la classe ouvri  re et des masses populaires. Ils peuvent aussi servir comme moyen d'animation et de sensibilisation    des questions non-couvertes par le mass-m  dia (Duchaine 1982, 15).

⁶ "Within GIV, videomaking represent a tool for social transformation. Our videos and approaches will impact the relations between men and women, from within a mixed space" (Author's translation).

In the late 1970s, GIV endorsed and investigated video technology as a low-cost and low-tech medium that would facilitate women's access to audiovisual production and that would foster political and solidarity relations among women. In the 1980s, GIV was equally engaged in producing and distributing videos through training workshops for women, and screening events. As the members working at GIV recall,

inspired by the feminist movement, the women directors at the center focused on distributing exclusively videos made by women. The decade was marked by several initiatives crucial to GIV's future direction, such as the addition of experimental videos as well as works in English to its catalogue; the participation in the first cross-Canada tour of artist-run centers and the collaboration with Latin-American artists. Besides, and in tandem with these activities, the first video training workshops for immigrant women and emergent artists were organized. (Alves, Nunez, and Sedano Alvarez 2020).

During the 1990s, GIV further extended its impact and influence within Montreal's cultural milieu through programs of dissemination. Most notably, since 1991, GIV has hosted *Vidéo de femmes dans le parc* (VFP, Women's Videos in the Park), an annual open-air screening of independent short videos. VFP is considered GIV's "signature event" because it showcases recent new video-productions by Canadian-based artists and because of its unconventional mode of exhibition of video-art in a public park.⁷ With its headquarters located, since 2006, in the heart of the Plateau, once a working-class neighborhood that is now a gentrified cultural hub in Montreal, GIV engages with the local artistic community and reaches out to the effervescent club, bar, and theatre tradition of this area. There, before the pandemic, GIV hosted recurrent in-house screenings and events meant to encourage dialogue between artists and the greater public. These dissemination activities include *La Voute/The Vault*, a program of independent Canadian videos

⁷ In a chapter that I co-authored with McGill Professor Alanna Thain, we theorized VFP as an "ephemeral festival" and we analyzed VFP's "visual architecture" under COVID. Both concepts are borrowed from Antoine Damiens, who in his work on LGBTQ film festivals, defines ephemeral festival as smaller, almost forgotten festivals, "that failed or happened only once" (Damiens 2020, 40) and that have consequently left little material trace in archives. While VFP is a very established festival, recurring annually, since 1992, its ephemeral character consists in its small-scale dimension and its singular exhibition setting that compel to expand major understanding and theorizations of film festivals. "Visual architecture" is a term that describes all those paratextual elements (posters, trailers, accreditation, venues) of a festival that contribute to define the identity of a festival itself. Thain and I analyzed how VFP's visual architecture (the setting in a park) was maintained and reproduced in the 2020 online version of the festival thanks to the pixelated animation realized by video-artist Manon Labrecque that shows GIV's staff members in Parc La Fontaine introducing the 2020 program for the public watching the videos on a screen.

from different time periods often in conversation with some of the works from GIV's historical collection, curated by in-house artistic director Anne Golden around a specific different theme selected every year; *Laissez Passer*, a *carte blanche* to external curators invited to make and discuss a video program after exploring GIV's collection; *Topovidéographies*, mentioned earlier, a program of videos around a theme, a geopolitical context, and/or a time period usually put together by an external curator. Other activities are *Une œuvre quand elle est aimée*, an exploration of GIV's archives curated by Nicole Gingras, who invites an artist to discuss it; *Communautés-Le GIV se promène*, a screening of independent videos within various citizen-based social and political organizations which stresses the informative value of video for political action; *Le GIV présente*, screenings of recent and less recent works in GIV's catalogue accompanied by artist talks at la Maison de la culture du Plateau-Mont-Royal, a cultural center managed by the city of Montreal. Through this constant dissemination practice, GIV's reveals the different, yet intertwined histories retraceable in its extensive collection, consisting of more than 1600 videos from different decades since the 1970s: one of the shifting discourses about and conventions of usage of video technology, and one of the transforming feminist politics, theories, and media practice in Quebec. As Alves, Nunez, and Sedano Alvarez explained in our 2020 interview: "These programs together with specialized written productions (catalogues, books, articles. etc.) connect our collection with particular contexts or topics in a way that reinforces its value. At GIV, curatorial activity is also a platform for advocacy and activism [...]."

While GIV's primary focus nowadays is disseminating video-art, it also advances its territorial commitment to social change. GIV has organized training workshops led by local artists and aimed at teaching technical skills to women. For example, between November 2019 and March 2020, GIV offered a workshop on editing with Adobe Premier, one on video installation, and one of video production. Moreover, GIV has collaborated with Atelier 850, a non-profit in Montreal's low-income Little Burgundy neighborhood, on the cultural mediation project "*Histoire en continu*." Part of Montreal's policy of cultural development, which draws on the notion of cultural mediation to make art and cultural activities more accessible to broader segments of the population, "*Historie en continu*" developed over two years between 2014 and 2016 and was aimed at training children of Little Burgundy in film animation, video art, and sound art. There were a series of workshops and artist talks led, respectively, by Diane Obomsawin, Eugénie Cliché, and Anne-Françoise Jaques, in collaboration with performance

artist lamathilde in the role of cultural mediator, and Atelier 850's social workers. After watching videos from GIV's catalogue, the children were encouraged to explore new ways of expressing themselves through video-making. This educational strategy builds on GIV's pedagogical efforts to encourage cultural change and alternative ways of expression through training workshops. When asked how this project fits into GIV's larger mandate, Petunia Alves replied: "Since its beginning, GIV has always been concerned with developing activities with populations that didn't have access to independent videos in order to acquaint them with the relevance of such medium and the world of independent works produced by women" (Racine, 2014). Such a project of cultural mediation attests to GIV's resilience and adaptability throughout the years, shifting from a grassroots independent organization to an organism that navigates the possibilities offered by municipal policies and funding in order to carry forward its commitment to social change and community building.

Groupe Intervention Vidéo in Context: Quebec Video History and Quebec Feminism

GIV's early use of video technology as a means of political intervention should be situated within the larger context of the development of Quebec activist video practices. As Scott MacKenzie explains, "video in Québec developed alongside a new sense of community that emerged from the social upheavals of the 1960s, the rise of leftist nationalist discourses, and the dramatic shifts in Québécois society in the wake of *la révolution tranquille*" (MacKenzie 2004, 148). The 'Quiet Revolution' or *révolution tranquille* has come to define the period of modernization of Québec during the 1960s. It was characterized by a series of reforms that lead to secularization and the construction of national infrastructures. Yet, during this period, leftist politics also gained strong traction, in particular the Front de Liberation du Quebec, a Marxist group founded in 1963 that sought to overthrow the Quebec provincial government and establish an independent Quebec. The group committed several acts of political violence climaxing in the so-called "crisis of October" (1970), when it kidnapped British diplomat James Cross and Quebec government's employment minister Pierre Laporte. In response, the Canadian government proclaimed the War Measures Act on Oct 16, 1970, which suspended civil liberties and put the army in control of the province.

Within this heated cultural and political climate, video technology galvanized the use of media to foster social action because it was “light” and easier to use compared to the bulkiness of film.⁸ The *Société Nouvelle/Challenge for Change* (SN/CFC) is one of the most celebrated examples of the democratic forms of media production that embodied this renewed shared sense of community (Waugh, Baker, and Winton 2010; Bishop 2012; Adamson 2018). From 1967 through 1980, SN/CFC was an “activist documentary program” at the National Film Board (NFB) that exploited the possibilities of video (NFB “Challenge for Change”). The organizers of SN/CFC collaborated with citizens and activists in various communities to make their documentaries. This created a “cinema of intervention,” or a participatory practice, whereby subjects were integrated into the filmmaking process. The participants in the SN/CFC program watched the footage after a quick turnaround, enabled by video technology. They could then provide their own perspective on the material and identify problems observed during the shooting (Bouchard and Froger 2015, 22). Although the NFB still prioritized film as its main format, SN/CFC’s success prompted further video-based social intervention projects. As discussed by cinema and media scholar Janine Marchessault, “video became the choice technology for the participatory practice” and “several video access centres were set up across Canada [...] to encourage community culture [...]” (1995, 17).⁹ Among these, *Vidéographe* specifically promoted the democratization of video production and distribution technologies, supporting experimentation with the medium on both levels of form and content (Vidéographe, “Mandat et

⁸ The first portable video recording system was the Portapak, available at the NFB since the late 1960s and then commercialized in 1967.

⁹ In “Amateur Video and the Challenge for Change”, Marchessault theorizes video technology as a “collective mirror” that enhanced the filmmaking participatory practice initially developed by Colin Low in his films documenting life on Fogo Island and hence known as “The Fogo Process” (1995, 16). The phrase “mirror machine” points at the possibility offered by video technology to documentary subjects to view themselves and their communities on screen shortly after the shooting phase. Through their ‘reflection’ on screens, participants could discover their behaviour, “bring their ideas to better order” (16), and consequently spark new dialogues and collective action across their community. Marchessault does not uncritically describe how the dominant aesthetic trope (talking heads) and observational paradigm of the “refracted gaze”—“citizens watching themselves interviewed” (19)—resulting from the participatory process within the CFC, “obliterates the institutional framework” of the state that sponsors the program and gives an illusion of the program as a community initiative (19). Yet the formulation of video as a “collective mirror” remains a productive framework to address the specific use of video technology within women’s collectives as an instrument that, through reflection, could illuminate women’s needs, instigate awareness, and ultimately engender new conversations and collective solutions. In this respect, see footnote 19 and my discussion of *Chaperons Rouge*.

Historique”).¹⁰ Both CFC/SN and *Vidéographe* foregrounded alternative community-based modes of media production, which fostered the development of other video collectives advancing democratic forms of media production (MacKenzie 2004, 155).¹¹

It is within that context of participatory and socially engaged video production that women’s groups and feminist activists in the 1970s documented their activities on video (Barlow 2003; Jeanjean 2011). In her overview of independent video groups in Quebec, Daniel Carrière acknowledges the crucial and original usage of video technology within women’s groups, writing:

Les femmes se sont approprié le magnétoscope assez tôt et n’ont jamais cessé de s’en servir pour faire valoir leur histoire, leur identité et leurs revendications. À défaut du cinéma, chasse gardée des hommes, il leur restait à développer la spécificité d’un medium moins porte vers la ségrégation et qui offrait, en plus, une vision sociale. (1991,19)¹²

Vidéo Femmes was the first women’s collective engaged in exploring the affordances of video technology, founded in 1973 by Helene Doyle, Helene Roy, and Nicole Giguère in Quebec city (Minna 2019). Vidéo Femmes’s mandate was to support the production of independent video documentaries made by women and to distribute them to a large public. Between 1977 and 1988, Vidéo Femmes organized the *Festival des filles de vues*, conceived as venue to ensure the visibility of productions developed within Vidéo Femmes. Another important women’s video collective in Quebec was the lesbian separatist group Réseau Vidé-Elle—mentioned in the introduction of this chapter - founded in 1974 by Dianne Heffernan and Suzanne Verthy, both interns at the NFB at the time. Initially, the group organized technical video production workshops for women mostly working in non-creative roles at the NFB. Later on, Réseau Vidé-

¹⁰ Vidéographe was founded in 1968 by Robert Forget and become an independent organization in 1973 (Mackenzie 2004, 13).

¹¹ Other video groups mentioned by Mackenzie are Vidéo-Vehicule (founded in 1976, which became PRIM), Vidéo Tiers-Monde, Cinéma Libre, GRAAV, and Maximage.

¹² “Women’s have seized videocassette recorder quite early and they never stopped using it to assert their history, their identity, and their demands. Since cinema is closely guarded as male-dominated domain, the only option left to women was to develop the specificity of a less segregating medium [video] and that, furthermore, would enable a social vision” (Author’s translation).

Elle specialized in producing videos that witnessed to and documented the political cultural and social life of lesbian women in Quebec (Heffernan 1992).¹³

As a distribution company, *Groupe Intervention Vidéo* (GIV) emerged as a politically engaged group that since the 1980s has specialized in providing an infrastructure for women to make and exhibit documentaries and experimental videos focused on gender-relevant issues. As Scott MacKenzie has described GIV's politics of audience creation and distribution:

Concerned with returning to the principles of political video-making and interested in setting up a better distribution network that would allow their videos to reach wider audience, GIV attempted to unite political concerns with a rethinking of who constituted its target audience and how this audience could be reached. (2004, 155)

Explicitly embedding political matters into cultural and artistic work through video technology, GIV took an activist approach to video distribution, diffusion, and exhibition. Within GIV, video technology not only provided women with a less rigid infrastructure to make films outside the mainstream circuits of media production, but also worked as a catalyst for social action, serving the cause and goals of the feminist movement with videos such as *Ceci est un message de l'idéologie dominante* (*This is a Message from Dominant Ideology*, Michel Sénécal and Michel Van de Walle, 1975) and *À notre santé* (*To Our Health*, Louise Vandelac, Josianne Jouët, Dominique Barrier, 1977).¹⁴ Among GIV's videographic production of these years,

¹³ Both these groups do not exist anymore. Video Femmes was absorbed into the production cooperative Spira, while Réseau Vidé-Elle stopped its production in the mid-90s.

¹⁴ The first deconstructs dominant bourgeois ideology conveyed in mass media; the second documents the international meeting of women's health centers held in Rome in 1977. Both videos are available on VUCAVU at <https://vucavu.com/fr/rechercher?yearrangeid=6&distributorid=16463&orderby=date>. These two videos are exemplary of different formal and production strategies enabled by video technology for feminist politics. The first one, through a pedagogic approach, employs footage of the Radio-Canada's series *Rue des Pignons* - broadcasted between 1966 and 1977 - that is commented on by a voice-over explaining how the family portrayed in the story reproduces bourgeois and patriarchal ideology. *À notre santé* is an example of how video was considered as an essential part for the development of some aspects of feminist struggles, especially those linked to reproductive rights and sexuality. A delegation of women from Quebec attended and documented an international meeting of women's health groups in Rome, Italy. The video illustrates the work of Italian feminists within "consultori" (women's health centers) in Rome, engaged in providing information on abortion and assisting women through this procedure's process. A women's self-help group from Leeds explains how to practice aspiration of menstruation as a contraceptive method. French women discuss issues of sexuality, deconstructing heteronormative sexual practices centered on male pleasure. Thus, the video brings together the variety of reflections and practices developed by each group, as well as the exchange of knowledge among the groups generated at the international meeting in Rome. In capturing collective sessions of women seated together, sharing information, discussing their experiences, and providing practical demonstrations of conducting vaginal examinations, this video documentary participates into a

Chaperons Rouges (1979) remains a cornerstone of feminist video history in Quebec and beyond. This 44-minute video was the result of a friendly collaboration between H       Bourgault of GIV and H       Doyle of Vid     Femmes. As recounted by H       Bourgault in 1980, at the origin of this joint project was the intention of making a video of women’s sexuality, but given the exchange with the Centre d’aide aux victimes du viol, the video-makers decided to address the topic of rape and rape culture (Le Groupe d’intervention Vid     1980, 16).¹⁵ This video is important for two main reasons: its innovative form on the one hand, and the processual and collaborative production method on the other. First, according to scholar Ren     Baert, *Chaperons Rouges* advances an “interrogation of the process by which women are culturally solicited into positions of victimization and passivity” and enables “the enunciation of the pronouns ‘we’” revealing the “community of women as a location in which it is possible to refuse the order of victimization and develop alternative ways of being” (1995, 1991). In the video, the issue of rape is addressed as collective through the editing of talking heads sequences of women sharing their traumatic experiences, a dance performance of Christiane Vein that expressively mimes the warping of the body during non-consensual sex, and plenary meetings of women that compare the fable of Little Red Riding Hood to rape culture. Second, as described in an essay on GIV’s collective approach to videomaking by Roselyne Landry and Diane Poitras, *Chaperons Rouges* was produced constantly consulting the organizers of and participants in the support groups of the Centre d’aide aux victimes du viol. As such, the video is “the product of a collective method and is consequently situated against *auteur cinema*. And, since it was conceived as tool to be used in the networks of women’s groups, its distribution was granted even before it was finished” (1980, 110).¹⁶

As illustrated very well by the example of *Chaperons Rouges*, the production process at GIV was particularly integrated with the distribution phase within women’s groups in the 1970s and 1980s. These groups directly supported GIV’s productions through the delineation of theoretical frameworks and analytical approaches to address women’s concerns. The centre also provided venues for exhibition of the documentaries produced (Morin, Poitras, Hubert 1983,

political aesthetic of feminist documentary, defined by Julia Lesage as formally reproducing the practice of consciousness-raising (Lesage 1978). Moreover, the video attest to transnational exchanges between women’s groups already the 1970s.

¹⁵ This rape help center, funded in 1975, developed resources to support women to deal with the consequences of rape (Brodeur et al. 1982, 47)

¹⁶ Author’s translation.

249). Thus, throughout the years, GIV has geared its mandate to a feminist agenda, shifting and adapting to the context of socio-political work carried out by the various feminist groups active in Quebec. In this they acted as more than just a distributor, but as a space dedicated to furthering women's interests. Ann Golden, current artistic co-director of GIV, was in charge of the distribution in the 1990s. She explains:

Nous faisons partie de plusieurs groupes qui revendiquent pour les droits des femmes...notre mandat est de distribuer et de produire la video féministe, mais aussi d'être un centre de ressources pour les femmes qui cherchent à s'informer sur les lieux qui existent pour elles et les lois qui les concernent. (Carrière 1991, 19)¹⁷

Throughout this period, GIV promoted feminist art across both francophone and anglophone circuits, contributing to the evolution of feminist discourse within Quebec. They translated videos for anglophone foreign distribution and worked within networks of local community service centers, like universities, women's shelters, and other feminist spaces, including the Montreal feminist art gallery *La Centrale*.¹⁸ While GIV's active role as a safe space for women within the informal networks of the larger feminist community resembles less standard media distributors, it reflects their origins within the specificity of Quebec feminist militant networks in the 1970s.

The rise of feminist communities in Quebec during the 1960s and 1970s was a confluence of both politically moderate and radical feminist movements. Both streams constitute the foundation for the institutional infrastructures, political practices, and theoretical positions of Québécois feminism. The first, usually referred to as "reformist/liberal" feminism, consisted of middle-class women's organizations that worked within the existing political structures of the provincial and federal governments to expand women's rights (Descarries 2005, 146). One of the important organizations, the Federation des Femmes du Quebec (FFQ), founded in 1966,

¹⁷ "We are one of numerous groups that struggle for the acknowledgment of women's rights.... Our mandate is distributing and producing feminist videos, while also being a center for women who are looking for information on spaces dedicated to them and on laws addressing their issues" (Author's translation).

¹⁸ In his « Dossier : la vidéo indépendante québécoise », Daniel Carrière describes GIV as such: « GIV's aims is to contribute to the evolution of feminist discourse. Its [distribution] network reaches to Community Health Centres, *La Centrale*, universities, women's shelters, and other community organizations, with which GIV produces documentaries according to their necessities and create an informal genre of videos" (1991, 19) (Author's translation). *La Centrale*, now *La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse*, founded in 1973, is a "space for the production, exhibition and promotion of art works made by women." Originally, a non-mixed space, this artist-run centres shifted its mandate in 2007 to embrace contemporary feminist politics "grounded in a politics of solidarity, trans-inclusion, and dedicated to inter-generational dialogue" (*La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse* 2012, 9).

promoted education and social reforms for women. Notably, the FFQ, along with anglophone women's groups across Canada, formed the National Action Committee for the Equality of Women in Canada (CEWC), which lobbied to implement the *Royal Commission on The Status of Women Report* (1971) (Luxton 2001, Reed 2005). The second, more radical fringe of Quebec feminism, developed during the 1960s and 1970s in conjunction with the Québécois nationalist movement, as Janine Marchessault cogently argues (1996). In 1969, anglophone McGill students and francophone labour activists formed the *Front de la liberation des femmes québécoises* (Québec Women's Liberation Front, FLF). The FLF's political strategy and theorization of oppression was characterized, according to Marchessault, as a dichotomy between Marxist-Leninism and American radical feminism.¹⁹ That led to tension between the anglophone members influenced by American radical feminism, which was crucial for the definition of the group's political orientation, and the francophone members who hewed closely to the Marxist ideology of the *Front de Liberation du Québec*, and the militant politics of third world liberation movements. When the francophones embraced separatist politics and felt the need to formulate the linguistic and geopolitical specificity of their oppression, they expelled the Anglophones. The slogan "Pas de Quebec libre sans liberation des femmes! Pas de femmes libres sans liberation du Quebec!" (No liberated Quebec without women's liberation, no liberated women without Quebec's liberation) summarizes the FLF's separatist politics, which articulated women's liberation within national liberation and against capitalism through socialism. The tension between these approaches led first to the reformation of the FLF into the *Centre des femmes* (1971–75), and then ultimately to its disintegration.

By the mid 1970s, radical, grassroots feminist organizations shifted their primary commitment from socio-political action to focus on the value and importance of feminine language, and women's culture and art. The *Parti Québécois* supported these cultural collectives for women, and crucially influenced the feminist movement's move from separatist social action to cultural development. Thus, between 1974 and 1981, there was a surge in feminist cultural spaces and autonomous women's groups, including GIV, which created "a loose feminist

¹⁹ "On the one hand, a Marxist-Leninist analysis would provide the tools for understanding capitalism and the family. On the other, an American radical feminism would supply the group with a discourse of difference and identity without reducing oppression to a division of labour. While the Marxist-Leninist position stressed a science of politics, class analysis and collective struggle, radical feminism offered a more culturally directed, individuated and utopian politic" (Marchessault 1996, 44).

infrastructure that staged events and demonstrations together.”²⁰ According to Marchessault, these cultural spaces developed out of the increasingly identitarian politics at the core of both the feminist movement and the nationalist movement in Quebec. While the ties between these two movements facilitated more generalized support to women’s rights in society and the institutionalization of feminism in the public sphere and within public discourse, there were also problematic implications in its narrow, geopolitical focus (Marchessaults 1996, 46).

Since then, both in terms of theory and politics, francophone feminism in Quebec has slowly integrated other perspectives than those rooted deeply in Quebec’s nationalist project. As recently as 2018 Diane Lamoureux was lamenting that “a feminist critique of past and present modes of globalization still needs to be elaborated, and then translated into feminist activism” (2018, 193). Yet Quebec feminists have shifted their agenda since the defeat in the 1995 Quebec independence referendum (Lamoureux 2018, 195).²¹ Quebecois feminists (including francophone and anglophone activists) began to embrace broader social justice concerns and develop “a new sensitivity towards ethnic diversity within Québec society” (2018, 196). Two major events organized by Quebec feminists illustrate this turn. The first was the Bread and Roses March in 1995, a multi-day march from Montreal to Quebec City.²² Janet Conway has argued that this march reinvigorated grassroots feminist activism, which rejected Quebec’s increasingly neoliberal policies, and institutionalized reformist approaches to social change (2008, 213). The March established a network of solidarity across the specific interests of different local groups. The second event was the World March of Women (WMW) in 2000. Farida Osmani noted that the march “integrated the concerns of immigrant women” into their political agenda (2002, 144). These rallies rearticulated Quebecois feminism within a transnational, anti-globalization struggle, and acknowledged Aboriginal women’s issues and their right to self-determination. Moreover, the current work done by Quebec cultural centers, collectives, and associations linked to the

²⁰ Marchessaults mentions a number of autonomous women’s groups, including Theatre des cuisines, The Women’s Health Centre of the Plateau Mont-Royal, the Feminist Documentation Centre, les éditions du remue-ménage. (Marchessault 1996, 44).

²¹ The 1995 Quebec referendum was the second referendum that, after the one in 1980, called Quebecers to vote on whether Quebec should proclaim national sovereignty.

²² “In 1995, from 26 May to 4 June, 850 women in three contingents departing from Montreal, Longueuil, and Rivière du-Loup marched 200 kilometers to Quebec City. The intention of this march was to make concrete demands and exert pressure on the government of Quebec to end poverty. [...] As a strategy, the March reflected feminist recognition of the neoliberal turn in Québec, the need to defend historic gains and to recover a tradition of grassroots militancy” (Conway 2008, 213).

academic milieu, such as GIV, has been crucial to the development of a Quebec feminist movement that acknowledges women's diverse localization within social relations (Lamoureux and Mayer 2019).

Within the constellation of feminist groups in Quebec, GIV's specific approach foregrounds the use of media technology. "GIV's identity and mandate are rooted in a feminist tradition that is expressed through video" Petunia Alves, Liliana Nunez, and Veronica Sedano Alvarez said during my interview (2020). Media technology, for GIV, is a tool that can dismantle commercial and dominant networks of moving image production, distribution, and circulation. Today, GIV's video catalogue reflects both the historical fault lines that run through Quebec feminism, and proposes theoretical and artistic feminist interventions that draw attention to the complexity and variety of experiences that expand beyond Quebec's major national and feminist historical narratives. GIV's distribution and exhibition of experimental and documentary videos contributes to a feminist praxis that integrates Quebec feminism with transnational, postcolonial, and intersectional perspectives. Through their curatorial practices and use of online streaming services—such as video programs that combines work produced in different contexts, or the selection of documentaries available online, which I will analyze in the last part of this essay—GIV remediates the cultural discourse and historical memory that contributes to a renewed feminist project in Quebec.

GIV's celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2015 with an exhibition at VOX-Centre de l'image contemporaine, an art gallery in Montreal, and by expanding its online streaming service and developing new digital communication strategies.²³ The exhibition and online services

²³ The exhibition at VOX, titled *GIV le 40e*, was part of a larger event titled "Faire des histories", curated by Nicole Gingras within the 33th edition of the FIVA and including two video-installations, one by Kim Kielhofner and the other by Nikki Forrest, beside GIV's video programs, all exhibited at VOX. Taken together, these videos, according to Gingras, spawn a reflection on the different meanings of "memory", intended as a perceptual faculty, as a way of telling stories, and as archive. The part dedicated to GIV As a whole, the event displayed video as a tool for making history. Within this context, Gingras explains that GIV's video practice over 40 years has been a method of resistance, of narrating and creating counter-histories. *GIV le 40e* included: 6 video programs, curated by Ann Golden and Petunia Alves, showcasing 40 videos in chronological order and uncovering the various forms, themes, and technological video formats through the different decades of GIV's history; archival documents such as posters, catalogues, and photos (VOX, "Faire des histoires"). The exhibition of this material, both the videos and the documents, in the gallery space invited the spectators to walk through the collection and to wear headphones to watch the videos on small television screens arranged around in each room, thus reproducing the bodily experience of the audiovisual historian that has to look through documents around the archive space looking through documents and then has to sit at a workstation to watch audiovisual documents. Displaying videos produced in obsolete formats as well as contemporary examples of artists' inventive use of video, the exhibition also suggested an optimistic viewpoint on the medium, as also explicitly stated by curators Alves and Golden, who wrote: "Pour ce qui est de

addressed how its audiovisual and material collection is an archive of technological changes in video technology since the 1970s, shifting feminist approaches to video-making, and the history of feminist movement in itself. The acknowledgement of GIV's role as a crucial actor within the history of local and international feminist media culture also prompted the consolidation of transnational exchanges with artists and women's collectives in Latin America, first started in the 1980s and later consolidated thanks to the presence of Brazilian-born Petunia Alves, Mexican-born Liliana Nunez, and more recently Cuban-born Verónica Sedano Alvarez in GIV's board.

In this respect, I would like to mention the event *El oportuno Ojo feminista* (September 2015) and the collaboration with the Colombian collective la Redhada. *El oportuno Ojo feminista* was a major occasion of knowledge production on Latin American feminist art and video-art. It was co-organized with OBORO, another Montreal-based artist-run center dedicated to development of visual and media arts, performing arts, new technologies, and emerging practices. Curated by Julia Antivillo, Chilean art historian and feminist artist, *El Oportuno Ojo Feminista* included numerous events. There were three video programs—"The Pioneers," "Border She Is," and "The New Generation and Counter-Manifestos"—each exploring different decades of video feminist art in Latin America from the 1970s to the 2000s. There was a conference "Artivism Against Heteronormativity," which was "offered in Spanish with simultaneous French translation" (GIV's report on the event). And, there was Antivillo's performance *La Dama. Pleasures and Other Vibrations*. A digital database of Latin American women artists was made available, still consultable on GIV's website. And, finally, engraved posters against violence and femicide were hung around the city as a public art action. The posters were made by the Mexican collective Mujeres Gabrando Resistencias, in solidarity with #VivasnosQueremos and in collaboration with the Montreal-based feminist street art collective Wall of Femmes.²⁴ GIV acted as a central node connecting an international network of grassroots feminist movements,

l'avenir de la vidéo, nous ne pouvons qu'être optimistes face à un médium déclaré mort à de multiples reprises et qui demeure bien vivant. Quant à nous, nous sommes toujours là, prêtes pour les 40 prochaines années" (VOX, "Faire des histoires").

²⁴ #VivasnosQueremos is a march against gender-based violence organized in Mexico by Cynthia Hjar in 2016 after the release and discharge of Yakiri Rubio a woman charged with capital murder for stabbing one of her rapists in 2013).

translating the Latin American feminist struggles against gender-based violence for the Montreal feminist art and political scene.²⁵

The women's collective la Redhada was funded in 2009 with the primary objective of giving visibility to and promoting the artistic work of women's artists from the Colombian-Caribbean region through itinerant art exhibitions, constant networking with international women's organizations, public workshops, and ultimately a database of works available online. After finding no gender-specific perspectives in art exhibitions in the Colombian-Caribbean region before 2010, la Redhada was formed to foster curatorial work on sexual identity, women's sexuality, critique to religion and denunciation of gender-based violence. Most members of the collective are diasporic Colombian scholars, who developed their commitment to challenge male-dominated and exclusionary art institutions through their own professional networks (Cuesta Flórez 2013). Within *Vis a vis*, a gender-specific video-art exhibition, la Redhada invited Anne Golden and Petunia Alves to curate a program of works from GIV's collection called *GIV le 40e Programción Historica*. The screening, complemented by a conference given by Colombian-born and Montreal-based artist Helena Martin Franco, included mostly Quebec and Canadian videos produced between the 1990s and the 2010s, as well as a Chilean and an Argentinian videos with the intent to "present the diversity of practices, themes, and technologies of video history and constant redefinition of our identities" (Alves and Golden, 2016. Exhibition catalogue). The program explores sexual and gender identities challenging established gender norms and bodily expectations from queer and trans perspectives (*Brothers*, Anne Golden 1998; *Mr. B*, Cathy Sisler 1994; *Narcissus*, Coral Short, 2011); a denunciation of gender-based violence (*Monumento à Ciudad de Juárez*, Claudia Bernal, 2002); social upheavals against neoliberal austerity (*Pulse*, Isabella Hayeur, 2015); a reflection on the evolution of video technologies (Nelly-Ève Rajotte, 2013) and on unusual spectatorial positions (*Les yeux dans les yeux*, Chantal DuPont, 2016). Instead of insisting on the tradition of documentary activist video, this program emphasizes the aesthetic strategies of video-art, yet without abstracting it from socio-political and historical issues. La Redhada and GIV collaborated again in 2018 with *Vis-à-vis/Visionnaires Femmes*

²⁵ The 2021 wave of feminicides in Quebec revamped feminist activism with protests and collective action, often without acknowledging the political and theoretical work that Latin American feminists have been carrying on against gender-based violence especially with the movement Ni Una Ni Menos since 2015.

artistes de la Caraïbe et du Pacifique colombiens, a video program curated by Alexa Cuesta Flórez and Helena Martin Franco and presented in Montreal.

The history of GIV within the video practices and feminist movements in Quebec reveals a progressive expansion in the larger ecology of feminist media. Starting off as a media center dedicated to the production and distribution of politically-engaged video, the centre gradually accumulated in its distribution catalogue a vast collection of video-art by local and international artists. Today GIV acts as an archive, insofar as it preserves, appraises, and make accessible a collection that constitutes an immense resource on feminist history, evolving feminist approaches to videomaking, as well as on changing technological formats of video.²⁶ At the same time, GIV developed a distinctive mode of doing feminism, based on the curation of its collection and grounded in the establishment of a distribution and exhibition circuit through media technology. The maintenance of such technological infrastructure is at the core of GIV's labor. In the next two sections of this chapter, I will first consider GIV's use of streaming platforms as an original mode of participating in networked feminism and in a larger streaming ecology, which constitutes the variegated ensemble of streaming platforms through which audio-visual contents are increasingly available. I will then examine GIV's own discourse around streaming platforms in relation with its larger definition of the relationship between media and feminism.

Networked Feminism and Streaming Platforms

On April 3, 2020, GIV sent an email to their members in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the message, it announced the temporary closure of the art center in compliance with the Quebec government's preventive measures. This decision spoke broadly to the challenges that many public and private sectors of cultural production and distribution have faced since the beginning of the pandemic, particularly in independent and niche circuits such as feminist media.

Throughout the pandemic, GIV has continued its work as a distributor, disseminating their videos "remotely" through online streaming to guarantee their associated artists' constant visibility (GIV

²⁶ In this respect, GIV constitutes one of the case studies within the SSHRC-funded project Archive/Counter-Archive, "dedicated to activating and remediating audiovisual archives created by Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis, Inuit), the Black community and People of Colour, women, LGBT2Q+ and immigrant communities. Political, resistant, and community-based, counter-archives disrupt conventional narratives and enrich our histories" (Archive/Counter Archive, "Welcome"). Within this project, GIV's collection is examined as an archive through which it is possible to create knowledge on the history of the changing formats and uses of video, as well as a counter-archive that provides alternative histories on "feminism, immigration, sexuality, relationship to the self, violence, discriminations and oppressions, aging, technological transformations" (website).

2020a). While GIV had online distribution before COVID-19, it primarily relied on in-person gatherings for distribution and exhibition of feminist and queer work. As such, the pandemic greatly impacted this artistic centre's operations. During the difficult transition, they utilised streaming platforms to fulfill their mandate and maintain a political feminist and queer community and solidarity network: added new videos to their Video-On-Demand page on Vimeo, and for a limited time offered free streaming of recent catalogue acquisitions (GIV 2020b). According to Petunia Alves, Liliana Nunez, and Verónica Sedano Alvarez:

Streaming platforms allows us to reach and interact with more people across the world.... While the majority of our audience resides in North America (specifically in Canada), it generally includes a broader audience based in the major geographic regions of the world. The accessibility that these platforms provide is also resourceful for researchers, curators and educators.... In the particular current situation of the COVID-19, streaming platforms have allowed us to continue with our programming...and collaborations...: therefore, continuing to distribute and support the artists we work with during this difficult time. (2020)

Even before COVID-19, GIV used online distribution on Vimeo and VUCAVU to amplify its cultural and political impact. The streaming platforms increased transnational visibility, advanced accessibility for educational and artistic purposes, and sustained independent artists. As Alves, Nunez, and Sedano Alvarez further suggest, for GIV, streaming platforms promote “a constantly revisited feminism that encompasses all struggles concerning oppressed, marginalized, and under-represented groups” (Alves, Nunez and Sedano 2020).

GIV's use of streaming platforms is a continuation of the center's endorsement of video technology in the 1970s as a counter-technology for community organizing, social change, and artistic experimentation. GIV's turn to digital distribution and exhibition sustains its mandate to “promote women artists on the local, national, and international levels” and “maintain infrastructures open to technological change and sensitive to the needs of independent artists” (GIV, “Mandate”). Even so, GIV's discourse around technology is not simply progressive nor utopian: instead, it reveals a vigilant assessment of digital media's political economy within a complex local and transnational media ecology.

Mainstream networked feminism, which is “from hashtag activism to social media campaigns to hacktivism” (MacDonald, Radzikowska, MacArthur, Wiens 2022, 4), has often

overlooked the articulation of feminist politics and ethics involved in the labour of local, small-scale organizations like GIV, which contributes to a transnational feminist politics through curation of its archival collection and community care. Through their streaming platforms and programming, GIV reaches a global, intersectional audience beyond Quebec. This allows them to connect to feminist networks that address gendered oppression across the intersected axes of gender, class, and race, and geo-cultural experiences. While perhaps not exceptional nor exemplary, GIV's use of streaming platforms counters mainstream accounts of global feminism.

The internet and digital media have reshaped the distribution practices of artists' film and video (Balsom 2016). GIV's online offerings are in conversation with parallel initiatives in contemporary art, such as Vdrome or Arts.Film, or other streaming platforms increasingly adopted by feminist collectives and distributors such as the Inuit production company Arnait Video Productions, the US-based feminist distributor Women Make Movies, and the English feminist film journal *Another Gaze*.²⁷ Moreover, disenfranchised media producers from queer and BIPOC communities increasingly explore the affordances of the Web as a distribution platform to counter top-down network television's standard of content production and distribution.²⁸ As circuits of audiovisual distribution, these streaming services are alternative to cinephile art-house streaming platforms, such as Criterion Channel, Mubi, as well as to commercial Internet-distributed video services provided by major media conglomerates such as, for instance, Netflix, HBO, or Disney. I argue that GIV's engagement with this complex streaming ecology on Vimeo and VUCAVU is quite original because it is framed within the organization's feminist ethos of

²⁷ As discussed by Erika Balsom (2016), Vdrome is a curated online platform initiated in 2013 by Milan-based art curators and making cyclically available a selection of works by contemporary artists. Arts.film is a "virtual art center" (FIFA website) spawned in 2021 by the Montreal-based Festival International du Film sur l'Art (FIFA), which, in line with the festival's mandate, streams films on art and media arts all-year long in Canada. The collective Arnait Video Productions, founded in 1991, produces films and videos that focus on the articulation of gender issues from the perspectives of Inuit Women's. Some of the works produced by this collective are available on the online portal Isuma.tv (Mackenzie and Westerthal Stenport 2016). Women Make Movies periodically offers programs of films from its catalogue to watch for free online in North America. The feminist film journal *Another Gaze* has created a free streaming service called *Another Screen*, which showcases programs of rare films deemed of interest for feminist film criticism (Another Screen, "About").

²⁸ A case in point, in this sense, is OTV|Opent Television, the "nonprofit platform for intersectional television" founded in 2015 by scholar Aymar Jean Christian and Elijah McKinnon. Conceived to support Chicago-based independent media producers and artists providing them with assistance at various phases of production and an online digital space for the distribution and exhibition of their work, OTV showcases independent web series targeted to minority sexual and racial communities, especially in Chicago. The creation of this original streaming platform originated within Christians' larger research project on "open television", defined as Internet-based television distribution opposed to traditional "legacy television"- broadcast, cable, or premium networks. (Christian 2018, 20).

using video technology to foster and maintain a local feminist community with transnational outreach.

GIV's online distribution remediates and recontextualizes its feminist media catalogue, thereby renewing and inventing possibilities for the presence of feminist activist art in a saturated media environment. Remediation and recontextualization describe, respectively, the digitization of analog audiovisual material and the exhibition of digitized footage within new contexts (Brunow 2017, 97).²⁹ They both take part in what Dagmar Brunow calls "the politics of creating access to audiovisual heritage via online streaming opportunities" (Brunow 2017, 97). For Brunow, the accessibility of historical and archival audiovisual material on online platforms creates a transnational audiovisual memory, built on "archival and curatorial practices [...] enabling or countering a sense of belonging" (105). Brunow concludes that this "audiovisual footage travels through a variety of contexts and discursive formations," in which transnational and national frameworks regularly overlap (106). Drawing on Brunow's idea, I find that GIV's discourse around streaming platforms operates with a specific cultural purpose to curate and circulate historical knowledge about feminist media.

GIV's investment in the use of media technology to do feminist cultural work is situated within a larger context in which digital communications have a prominent role in the articulation of contemporary feminist activism and politics.³⁰ Yet GIV's modes of engagement with digital technology, grounded in a feminist ethic of care for community-building through curation and dissemination of historical and contemporary video-work, diverge from major visible instances of networked feminism such as hashtag feminism and other examples of social media campaigns. Digital communication scholar Aristeia Fotopoulou defines networked feminism as "the collective identities and communicative practices of activists [...] shaped by the social imaginary of the

²⁹ The notion of remediation is indebted to Bolter and Grusin's theorization of the term as "the representation of one medium in another" to describe in particular digital media's relation to their analogue counterparts (Bolter and Grusin 2000, 45). In the case of streaming platforms, the term is used by Brunow to stress the ways in which archival audiovisual material is made available against the obsolescence of films and electronic video with the explicit aim of diversifying an established cultural memory.

³⁰ This resurgence of feminist politics through online activism has been labelled as Fourth Wave feminism, an expression originally found in *the Guardian* (Cochrane 2013). While I do not completely endorse the wave narratives to understand the history of feminism according to a rigid categorization of the politics of each wave, which erases various positions within each wave, I take on Prudence Chamberlaine's understanding of Fourth Wave feminism as a form of activism that is organizing around "an affective temporality such that it recognizes historicity, looks to the future and responds to the demands of the present" (Chamberlaine 2017, 462). In other words, grassroots feminist strategies through new social media reassert the need of activist politics, creating connections with historical feminist struggles that are rearticulated through inclusive perspectives on diverse sexualities and cultures.

internet and digital engagement” (Fotopoulou 2016, 4). Fotopoulou encourages scholars to approach digital activism from a materialist perspective, that is as “social process of community formation and transformation of subjectivity” (15). Countering accounts of digital feminism that do not delve into an analysis of digital communication’s material impact on and repercussions in specific local cultures, Fotopoulou chooses instead an embodied perspective on digital feminism through an ethnographic methodology that allows her to examine how bodies are enacted as political subjects through technology. Similarly, film and media scholars Shana McDonald Milena Radzikowska, Michelle MacArthur, and Brianna Wiens define networked activism as “the various activist forms that take place through online networks and that have material and affective impacts in both mediated and unmediated arenas [...]. Networked feminist activisms have been crucial for inspiring counterpublic formation and maintenance, storytelling, coalition building, and intersectional education and advocacy” (McDonald et al. 2022, 4). GIV’s most important form of engagement with digital media—the curation of streaming platform—is far from feminist digital cultures’ immediacy and swift ability of generating visible material changes. Nonetheless, GIV’s curation of streaming platforms still has a tangible impact at the level of technological infrastructures of media distribution “where the messy, grinding, generally invisible labor of ‘doing feminism’ happens” (McKinney 2020, 8). Grounded in processual operations that, through careful, collaborative, and horizontal discussions among the members of the board, take into considerations the needs of the local community of artists and public forged throughout the years, GIV’s use of streaming platforms strengthen its community-based work of care and ensure the continued circulation of feminist and queer video-making from the late 1970s to today.

Media Technology as Feminist Praxis

GIV’s critical discourse on technology, more specifically on the relationship between women and media technology, was first elaborated through the exploration of early video equipment in the 1970s. In this section, I investigate how GIV’s historical understanding of video technology illuminates the organization’s more recent focus on the streaming platforms Vimeo and VUCAVU.

In the 1960s and 1970s, both media scholars and activist media collectives embraced the utopic and democratizing potential of video technology. Marshall McLuhan theorized media

technology as central and integral in the formation of everyday social, psychic, and cultural practice (Marchessault 2008, 12). For McLuhan, networks of communication technology formed a “global village” that made possible new environments and new means of human connection (Turner 2003, 1). Specifically, video could produce “communication within reach,” because it was light, transportable, instantaneous, and flexible (Bégin 1996). As a means for audiovisual production outside the rigid infrastructure of television institutions and film culture, portable video technology was regarded by women as an indispensable actor to make feminist politics. In the era between 1972 and the early 1990s, in Canada and across the world, women’s collectives turned to video “to create social-issue documentaries, experimental works, and sometimes cable television series that archived a vibrant era of political and social change,” writes Maryusa Bociurkiw (2016, 6). Bociurkiw defined these activities as characterized by “big affect,” which aptly grasps an embodied participation in the feminist movement through media technology, bringing forward “the relational and processual aspects of alternative feminist media” (Bociurkiw 2016, 8). Approaching feminist video production through the lens of “big affect” entails an understanding of the social and cultural meanings attached to the medium of video beyond a strict focus on the audiovisual texts produced in this period.

Advancing feminist politics through video is an integral aspect of GIV’s understanding of media activism. GIV’s predilection for video as a means of expression to counter a dominant visual imaginary is coupled with an ecological understanding of the medium as enabling a decentralized circuit of production, distribution, and exhibition outside dominant infrastructures of communication. In a critical report entitled “Do Women Fear Technology?” published in 1983, GIV’s members Albaine Morin, Diane Poitras, and Nicole Hubert explained:

Nous aimons faire sentir, à travers ce medium qu’on dit froid, la complicité tissée au tournage. Faire passer des émotions authentiques, des corps non stéréotypés, des comportements imprévisibles, et trouver le cadrage ou la façon de monter qui en rendra compte. [...] Parallèlement, nous mettons à l’essai différentes formules au niveau de la

diffusion et de la distribution : visionnement suivis de débats, en grands ou en petits groupes, publics-cibles pour certaines productions, etc. (1983, 246–48)³¹

Alongside GIV's attention to the technological aspects of its media practices, it developed a parallel focus on the political aesthetics offered by the new formats of electronic video in the 1970s, and on the political economy that they would feed. In other words, research on a new medial language, able to reform documentary modes of production and explore the technical potentialities of video, went hand in hand with the creation of new distribution and exhibition circuits. These worked in collaboration with unions and grassroots women's' groups in the 1970s, gradually coalescing with experimental video-art circuits as well.

The exploration of video as a means for documentation and artistic expression through collaborative working methods, as well as a catalyst for community development, is an integral aspect of GIV's feminist activism. GIV's research into the potential for media technologies to be used for feminist intervention, coupled with a sustained reflection on the embodied aspects of labor that feminist media making entails, has been carried on throughout the years and is now developed in the context of digital media. Broadly, in Quebec and elsewhere, video's imagined utopian possibilities for social change were revisited with the advent of digital technology. Over the last 40 years, there has been a convergence of technologies, social uses, and ideas coalesced under the term of video, which includes disparate forms of media from video-art to video-games, from amateur clips to television programs and films experienced on computers and mobile devices (Newman 2014). In their introduction to the 2013 special issue of *24 Images* on video art in Québec, Luc Bourdon and Philippe Gajan explicitly link video to modern digital technology and media. Both promise further levels of communication and reach through interactivity, mobility, and immersion. Bourdon and Gajan write, "YouTube and Vimeo have become the new screens available to everyone that the artists have long dreamt for. The possibility of obtaining high quality means of production with little expense is not a struggle anymore" (Bourdon and Gajan 2013, 6–7). The emergence of video in the 1970s, which enabled local production

³¹ "Through [video], this so-called cold medium, we would like to convey the bond created during the shooting. We would like to convey authentic emotions, non-stereotypical bodies, unpredictable behaviours, and find the right framing or proper editing that will express all these things. [...] Meanwhile, we are trying out various methods for distribution and dissemination: screenings followed by debates in large or small groups, target audiences for some production, etc. We even organized a festival with our own productions [...] in 1978" (Author's translation)

communities to create alternative networks of media cultures, anticipated and informed the potentials of participatory digital media culture.

GIV does not uncritically embrace this techno-utopian discourse that has accompanied the evolution of video in the digital era as a democratizing medium. Rather, they have consistently interrogated and explored the best practices to use digital media in line with its mandate and ethos. By adopting streaming platforms, GIV continued a relationship between technology, artistic practice, and activist intervention that began in the 1970s with video. Given GIV's historical commitment to the accessible distribution of women's work in the context of Quebec media activism, adopting streaming platforms is a logical continuation of this pattern.

In providing an analysis of feminist videos in France during the 1970s, Ros Murray has discussed how portable video technology provided a “nomadic gaze” and thus captured the *nuances* of the feminist movement in France. Drawing on Rosi Braidotti, Murray describes nomadism “as a critical strategy” and “a theoretical project concerned with creating a new feminist imaginary, resting on an intersectional approach that operates as a fierce resistance to all forms of hegemony” (Murray 2016, 103). In this way, nomadism is a strategy that builds “new forms of interrelatedness and collective political project” (103). GIV has seen video as a means to create connections and affiliations among women.³² While Murray individuates these forms of political interrelatedness as enabled by video technologies, I extend her argument to claim that GIV uses video streaming platforms to transnationally circulate video art featuring local political struggles and activist experiences, therefore articulating feminist political activism and thought at the interface of the local and the global. Through Vimeo and VUCAVU, the two streaming sites used by GIV on which I will elaborate in the following section, the cultural and political project of the group joins the networks of globally streamed media. While complicated by the platforms' organizational infrastructures and interfaces, which highly determine what videos can be uploaded and how they are to be consumed, GIV strategically uses the platforms as an act of care

³² In 1980, co-founders Hélène Bourgault and Louise Gendreon with videomaker Diane Poitras, reflecting on their approaches to video-making within GIV, wrote: “... écrire sur les femmes et la vidéo, à partir de nos diverses expériences de productions et de nos démarches propres, ça nous amène à nous interroger sur la spécificité du rapport femmes/vidéo, sur la relation que nous avons eue avec les autres femmes par le medium” (Le Groupe d'intervention Vidéo, 16).

through curation towards the community of artists and public that it serves in Montreal and transnationally.³³

Vimeo and VUCAVU: Video Streaming Platforms for Independent Distributors

In the context of my study on GIV, I hope to make a feminist intervention into the field of platform studies. Platform studies concerns the computational architecture, algorithms, and protocols of our digital devices and social media. While it is an important and emerging field, it nonetheless often overlooks the critical importance of gender (Anable 2018). For example, while Ramon Lobato provides good definition of the field, he does not go far enough in addressing specifically gendered concerns. Lobato usefully describes platform studies as “critical, empirical and theoretical research” that “seeks to understand how platforms mediate and organize our daily interactions” (Lobato 2018, 59). He then divides the field into two lines of inquiry. The first (see Montfort and Bogost 2009) focuses on the hardware and technical design, or what Lobato describes as “the materiality of the platform, including its design, construction and even wiring, as well as the platform’s user-facing and symbolic dimensions” (Lobato 2018, 49). The second line (see Gillepsie 2010) concerns “the agency of the platform itself,” which interrogates the supposed neutrality of platforms, which “shape the communications, interactions, and consumption that they facilitate [...] through interface design, policies, algorithm recommendation, etc” (Lobato 2018, 50). Similarly, Marc Steinberg understands platforms as “technological and managerial constructs that mediate our relationship to our worlds, that create habits, addictions and impulses” (Steinberg 2019, 3). Acknowledging the centrality that the word “platform” has found in both media industry and in media studies, Steinberg proposes an analysis of “platform discourse” and “platform building” to demonstrate that platforms are not only

³³ The theorization of the use of streaming platforms as an act of care came up during the interview conducted by Alanna Thain and me in March 2021, during which with Anne Golden and Verónica Sedano Alvarez explained their decision of hosting the 2020 edition of VFP online after careful considerations of the risks that an in-person event would entail for the elder portion of GIV’s public. Since the pandemic, GIV has implemented the exhibition of videos on streaming platforms through new dissemination programs. For example, *Focus* is a series that invite the public to discover the work of one specific artist whose work is distributed by GIV – two editions of this program in 2022 focused on Diana Inkest and Colleen Ayup. Moreover, GIV commemorated artist Chantal du Pont, passed away in 2019 with the program *Chantal duPont: Le point de fuite*, curated by Anne Golden. Most importantly, throughout the pandemic, GIV used streaming platforms to exhibit videos in response to important cultural and political recurrences: in occasion of the 2021 Women’s Rights Days and Black History Month, GIV made available respectively *Feminista* (Myriam Fougère 2017) and *Mami Wata* (Monique Dauphin 1991).

technologies, but also historical and cultural constructions (Steinberg 2019, 5). This line of enquiry can expand the field beyond what Aubrey Anable calls the “hard body of the computational architecture” to a feminist interrogation of embodied difference (Anable 2018, 139). Feminist approaches to platform studies draw parallels between the materiality of the platform and the materiality of the bodies that use them. They serve to challenge the problematic and naïve liberatory narrative of digital media. For example, Tara McPherson (2014) and Wendy Chun (2015) have examined how the materiality of platforms, such as design protocols replicate sexist and racist visions of bodies and habits that hinder collaborative feminist working ethics.

GIV describes Vimeo and VUCAVU as “platforms,” which emphasizes their intermediary function. These platforms were not created by GIV or specifically for GIV, and do not algorithmically challenge and change ways of distributing culture. This invites an analysis of tensions between the platforms’ digital protocols and the collectivist dissemination of feminist videos. While not a radical break from contemporary forms of film distribution and exhibition, GIV bends the functioning of these existing platforms to its own purposes, exploring their potential to promote and disseminate curatorial practices, while providing artists other means of revenue. Vimeo and VUCAVU, while both video streaming platforms, have significantly different audiences, scope, terms of service, and commercial mandates. While Vimeo belongs to a holding company based in the US, VUCAVU was developed within an agreement between independent Canadian distributors. Each platform thus offers different opportunities for visibility and dissemination of the works and the filmmakers that GIV distributes.

Vimeo is a “Professional Video Platform” founded in 2004 that hosts and shares videos. The website is tailored to filmmakers to showcase their work in the best possible setting (Vimeo, n.d.). Vimeo provides tools for uploading high-definition video, as well as curatorial control of on-site content,³⁴ which creators pay for through a Software as a Service (SaaS) subscription.³⁵ To further emphasize the value of creators’ work, since 2015 subscribers can sell or rent their video content through Vimeo’s VOD (video-on-demand) service. Vimeo’s polished interface — bold, white typography, high-resolution videos, and clean aesthetics, no ads — emphasizes the

³⁴ Progressively, Vimeo has introduced and implemented its technological protocols in the direction of fostering quality content delivery. These technologies include 4K, adaptive bitrate streaming, 360-degree video support, High-dynamic-range video, and AV1.

³⁵ The SaaS subscription licenses web-based software for video creation, editing, and broadcasting (Jaakola, 2020). This is in contrast to YouTube, the most widely used video sharing site, which is free for creators, but generates its revenue through advertising.

quality of the content, and the importance of the creator. In contrast to YouTube, Vimeo is less a platform for social media and more for creator-centred content delivery (Tavares 2015, 186). According to corporate material, Vimeo is sustained by “a community of real, amazing humans” that encourages its users “to create and contribute in positive ways” (Vimeo, n.d.). Yet — ironically perhaps — its interface does not allow content creators to make any major interventions. Therefore, GIV must adapt to Vimeo’s limited corporate model and cannot reimagine Vimeo’s mediating structure. GIV’s Vimeo page, accessible through GIV’s website, provides access to mostly feature documentary videos produced within the last twenty years. Each video is captioned, providing an introduction and the curator and/or artist’s statements (Fig. 1). Many of these documentaries depict the labour of feminist political organizing as well as militant activism across a broad variety of geopolitical contexts including Iran, Uganda, and India. They also address the different struggles between the personal and the political, the intimate and the global.³⁶

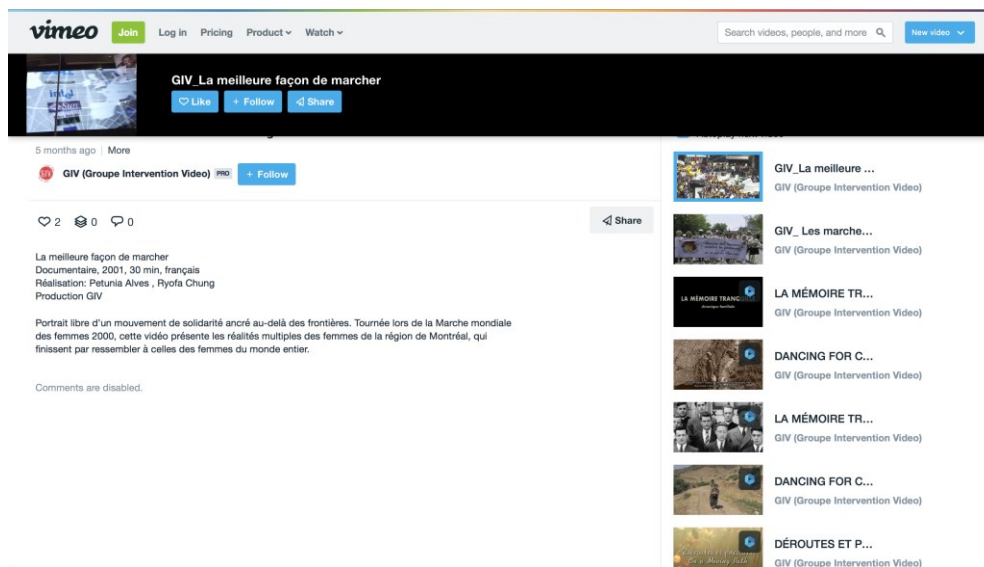


Figure 1 Interface of GIV’s page on Vimeo. Screenshot.

Conversely, the Coalition of Canadian Independent Media Art Distributors (CCIMAD) created VUCAVU in 2013 to increase visibility and access to Canadian media work globally, while also increasing Canadian filmmakers’ revenue. VUCAVU accomplishes this by curating themed programs that bring together Canadian films and videos from different distributors

³⁶ *Sangini* (Nancy Nicol, 2015); *And Still We Rise* (Nancy Nicol and Richard Lusimbo, 2015); *Dancing For Change* (Shahrazad Arshadi, 2015).

involved with the platform. VUCAVU works as an intermediary between artists and distributors on the one hand, and the general public as well as curators, programmers and media professionals, on the other.³⁷ Unlike other video sharing platforms, artists cannot directly upload their work and must be represented by a distribution partners, such as GIV. VUCAVU is organized, therefore, not by individual uploaders but by distributors. The subscription options emphasize the platform's intention to help Canadian artists both through revenue by bringing them into contact with curators, scholars, and professionals.³⁸ Artists receive 70% of the revenue that their works produce on the platform. Reflecting VUCAVU's emphasis on Canadian artists, there are artist pages with short introductions and biographical details (Fig. 2). Like Vimeo, GIV must adapt to the platform's interface and guidelines: each featured video must be tagged for indexing and can only be made by Canadian artists (Alves, Nunez, Sedano 2020).

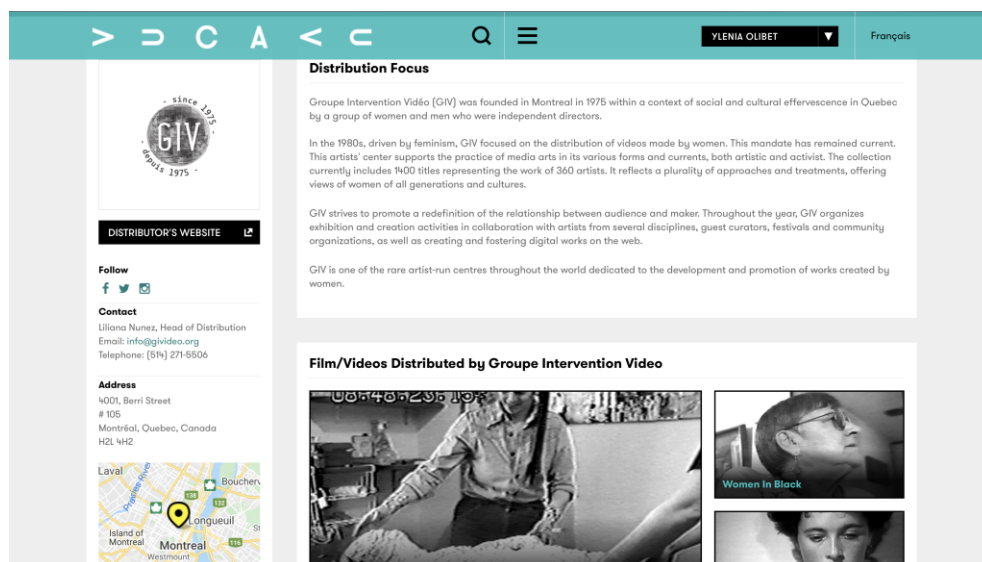


Figure 2 Description of GIV on VUCAVU. Screenshot.

The videos on VUCAVU span the history of GIV. Although a majority of videos are from the last two decades, with a particular focus on experimental video work, some of GIV's militant

³⁷ The relationship between VUCAVU and any artist whose work is exhibited on the platform is non-exclusive, meaning that the artist maintains the rights on their work and can choose to distribute their work on other services, too. This information was gathered at the online webinar "Visio-conférence Marketing, Film et Vidéo à l'ère du numérique" co-organized by VUCAVU and the FRIC and held on May 27, 2020.

³⁸ Users on VUCAVU can choose between three types of account: a free account that allows access to screening programs on rotation; a rental account that allows to rent videos according to different fees for forty-eight hours; and a professional account, that allows licensed professionals a 3-month temporary access to all works on the platform, or researchers 1-or 3-month illimited access through a subscription fee of \$15 to \$25.

documentaries of the 1970s are also featured. While VUCAVU may be pricy for a small company like GIV, the platform has two main benefits (idem). First, through its site-wide programming, VUCAVU grants GIV visibility on a global scale, enabling curators, museums, and programmers to purchase licensing for screenings, festivals, and exhibitions. Second, GIV is incentivized to digitize some of its content, through special financial support. VUCAVU grants GIV not only the possibility of digitizing videos and exhibiting them online, but VUCAVU's curated playlists also connect GIV's feminist and queer videos to a pan-Canadian network of experimental films and videos.

The selection of videos currently available on VUCAVU reflects the history of the uses of video technology within GIV and, at the same time, illustrates a gradual shift within GIV's collection from predominantly documentary videos to proper video-art. Along with didactic informative documentaries on feminist socio-political organizing, we can find experimental documentaries and experimental videos *tout-court*. None of the videos on VUCAVU are representative of GIV's origins as a mixed-gender collective focused on working-class struggles; instead, all the videos available on the platform feature feminist and gender-specific perspectives. The four videos from the 1970s available demonstrate how video dismantles dominant hegemonic views: mass media in Louise Gendron's *Ceci est un message de l'idéologie dominante* and *Femmes de rêve* (1979); and women's issues in *À notre santé* (Louise Vandelac and Dominique Barrier, 1977), and Martha Rosler's *Statistiques vitales* (1977). The videos from the 1980s, instead, are mostly documentaries that address local feminist struggles. Some concern body issues, such as sexual violence in Nicole Giguère's *Contre le viol: des mentalités à changer, des alternatives à développer* (1980); female sexuality in Mo Bradley's *Briser l'isolement: le sida chez les femmes au Québec* (1989); and abortion rights in Nancy Nicol's *La lutte pour le libre choix* (1986). Other videos are about women's political actions abroad: Nancy Marcotte's *Update Brazil* (1985) documents the establishment of police stations across Brazil run by plainclothes women that offer assistance with issues of sexual assault and family violence; and Diane Poitras's *Comptines* (1986) is an experimental video about the women's protests in Ireland in support of fasting political prisoners). Among the twenty-four videos from the 1990s available on VUCAVU, we find a larger selection of videos featuring postcolonial feminist and queer perspectives such as *Welcome to Africville* (Diana Inkster 1999), *Mami Wata* (Monik Dofen, 1991), and Monika Ille's *La Caravane des femmes autochtones* (1999); documentaries that

witness of the transnational turn in Quebec feminism like *Les marcheuses* and *2000 bonnes raisons pour marcher* (analysed in the last section of this essay); and experimental videos such as *Seeing is Believing* (Mona Hatoum 1991) which explores the texture of the image; or *Erased* (Mo Bradley 1999) which plays with linear time. Finally, the majority of videos from GIV's collection on VUCAVU are experimental videos from the last twenty years. Carol Short's *Narcissus* (2011) offers a performative and self-reflective inquiry on identity formation and digital technology. *Snap Shot* (Kim Kielhofner 2008) and *Rachki* (Kandis Friesen 2010) creatively reuse of personal and collective audiovisual archives. *La Petite Fille d'Avant* (Hind Bencheckroun 2005) and *Récits migratoires* (Sophie Bissonette 2013) represent diasporic narratives of identity formation.

Evidenced in the content choices, GIV adds clear feminist positionality to Vimeo and VUCAVU, even if their rigid design and protocols leave very little space for an actual feminist redesign of their interfaces. In a networked digital environment saturated with “popular feminism” (Banet-Weiser 2018), GIV's video catalogue, remediated and recontextualized, deconstructs the dominant discourses of visibility within neoliberal feminism (Rottenberg 2017). GIV's approach to streaming technology is what Alessandra Renzi termed “repurposing,” defined as “a way of folding technology into new sociotechnical assemblages that, in turn, enter into composition with their environment, forging connections with other groups and individuals” (Renzi 2019, 39). Indeed, even if GIV cannot directly “bend and hack” (Renzi 2019, 39) the infrastructures of the existing streaming platforms on which it relies on, it harnesses the potential of streaming as a way “to reach and interact with more people across the world” (Alves, Nunez, Sedano 2020).

Within the constraints of a small-scale media distributor, GIV's use of Vimeo and VUCAVU ensures the circulation of feminist discourses and to support artists, and attests to their constant feminist work at the level of technological infrastructure. Far from seeing streaming platforms as “neutral,” the cost of digital distribution online has important consequences for the labour and ultimately the politics of organizations like GIV. As Sedano, Alvarez and Nunez cogently stressed during our interview:

while working with streaming platforms can favour artists' visibility it also involves challenges. For instance, we have to make strategic choices concerning the best moment for certain videos to be available online. Those choices depend on the type of work and how institutions, festivals, independent curators, etc., have perceived these videos in terms of sales

and rentals. [...] Every time we make a work or video program available for free on the Internet, we pay the artist's fees. As for prices, we follow the rates of the AAMI, CQAM and CARFAC. [...] About the selection process, we make decisions as a team. Obviously, dealing with streaming platforms implies a lot of work for a small team like us.

GIV juggles their dedication to the principles of political video-making with the regulatory constraints of streaming platforms. The niche circuits of activists, filmmakers, and scholars, in which GIV has traditionally operated, are spaces generally defined by their shared interest in feminist or gender-oriented topics, aesthetic explorations, and social issues. Streaming platforms, in contrast, create an individualized setting of reception that is not specific to gender-oriented or specialized audiences and communities. Yet GIV considers and employs streaming platforms a fundamental instrument to maintain its community of artists and publics, creating accessibility especially during the difficult times of the pandemic, through targeted communication strategies.

Projecting Transnational Feminism from Québec: Experimental Video-Art and Documentary Strategies

Through Vimeo and VUCAVU, GIV's curatorial artistic practices promotes feminist moving image art and builds an audiovisual memory of feminist cultural and political organization. Their online film catalogue draws attention to the complexity and specificity of feminist video-documentary and video-art. The process of remediation, or digitizing, and recontextualizing, or the presentation of the newly digitized material within new discourses, their videos online creates a renewed memory of GIV's history of feminist media. In this last section, I consider how streaming platforms rearticulate GIV's catalogue within new, global flows of circulation (Gaonkar and Povinelli 2003). Through the curatorial selection of video available online, GIV remediates the cultural discourse and historical memory and contributes to a renewed feminist project in Quebec.

To celebrate GIV's 40th anniversary in 2015, GIV asked four curators to each develop a video program from their collection. Three of the four were sequentially available on Vimeo. Each program reflected the various documentary and experimental practices as well as technologies that characterize GIV's vast catalogue. These programs avoid a hegemonic understanding of agency and solidarity, as well as false universalism and limited Western perspectives.

Cheryl Sim curated the first program available online, entitled *Percer le bias/Piercing Sideways*. It brought together eight videos from all over the world to shed light on challenges women and queer people face in specific communities and to provide a catalyst for discussion and activism. Claudia Del Fierro's *Politically Correct* (2001) comments on the alienating working conditions of women in a garment factory in Santiago, Chile. soJin Chun, in *Re-oriented in Sao Paulo* (2010), interviews people in Sao Paulo, Brazil about its Korean community. She combines cinema-verité styled interviews with an absurd, ironic treatment of subjective point of view shots, foregrounding a Korean cheese corn dog. In *Welcome to Africaville* (1999), Dana Inkster plays with documentary conventions of direct address and interviewing to encounter black queer lives in a no longer existing community of Africaville in Halifax. Michelle Smith's *Trace souterraines* (2010) intertwines archival images and voiceover to denounce the violence against Metis communities in Canada and their erasure from official history. Using varying aesthetics and performative strategies to explore femininity, diasporic identities, and settler colonial histories in Canada, the videos deconstructed hegemonic discourse and, therefore, allowed various forms of expression and subjectivity to emerge, speaking to the ways in which globalization affects people around the world. With this program, GIV brought forward a transnational feminist political project that articulated gender-specific issues within global economic structures.

In the second program, *Gestures of Performativity*, Dyana McLeod chose videos from 1989 and 2014 that examine the use of performativity. These videos together investigate the potentiality of bodies and artistic gestures within a myriad of methods of technological interactions, and thereby question the socially and culturally-constructed identities that form the body's boundaries. For example, French-Canadian video artist lamathilde's *Almanach Lesbien* (2013) ironically describes various objects (among which, sex toys) considered central to the formulation of a lesbian collective imaginary through a combination of word play and short vignettes. In *And here* (2011), Victoria Stanton shows the artist's body lying down in different settings (a park, on a street, in her room, on her desk), disrupting the familiar, public versus private space through meditative postures of her body, revealing the performative quality of quotidian gestures. *Treasure Hill Camouflage* (2012) by soJin Chun reveals the body of the artist disguised in various open spaces in order to, as stated by the artist, "examine cultural and

physical camouflage as a method of survival.”³⁹ In doing so, they reflect on the history of Taiwan through the history of Treasure Hill Village. *Poilue* (2014) by kimura byol-nathalie lemoine questions masculinity through a bearded drag performance to resemble an Asian man. In dialogue with the conventions of experimental video-art, the program articulated a radical critique of representation, mapping subjectivities that define their own survival and political tactics revealing the performative nature of their embodied experience.

The third program, *Witnesses*, curated by Nicole Gingras, chronologically presents videos that foreground the formation of unfixed identities through looking and listening, and criticize normative epistemologies grounded in linear narratives and gazing. From more conventional collage techniques with *Femmes de rêves* (Louise Gendron 1979) and Tamara Vukov’s *Freak Girls* (2005), to an exploration of multisensory experience with *À la mémoire des oiseaux* (Gabriela Golder 2000), *Untitled (Self-Portrait)* (Nik Forrest 2010), and *De l’obsolescence de la cassette* (lamathilde 2012), the videos push the boundaries of perception through “video haptics” (Marks 1998). *Femmes de rêves* deconstructs the alienation and repetitiveness of women’s routines depicted in the adjectives describing traditional notions of femininity from magazines and television advertisements. *Freak Girls* reflects on the paradigm of “woman as spectacle” with archival images from the Prelinger Archives and the American Memory Archives at the Library of Congress showing contortionists, acrobats, dancers, and circus performers from the early twentieth century edited over Diamanda Galas’ jazz performance of “Lonely Woman.” *À la mémoire des oiseaux* renders the trauma of the 1976–83 dictatorship in Argentina, or the “The Dirty War,” visible. Oral interviews and textual titles play over historical archival images, family films, papers and objects on a split screen. The accumulation of images, voices, and text create a sensation of vertiginous memory of the dictatorship, which seems impossible to recount linearly. *Untitled (Self-Portrait)* (Forrest 2010) optically manipulates the textures of abstract close-ups of filmed bar-codes. Finally, in the eerie voice of an answering machine, *De l’obsolescence de la cassette* (lamathilde 2012) mourns for a loved one. This program reflects on disappearance, the production of memory, and the affective dimensions of objects through the haunting potentialities of media technologies.

³⁹ Treasure Hill is a squatter settlement in Taipei, Taiwan, whose spatial organization, symbiotically integrated with the natural environment, and social cohesion were exploited to transform the illegal settlement into a co-living artist village, which ultimately led to the departure of many residents.

These curated video programs, exhibited on streaming platforms, explore and assert solidarity between women's experiences across race, class, and national boundaries working toward a feminist transnational project. They encapsulate various tendencies of video-art, but also bring to light transnational approaches to documentary video-making.

Through a triptych of activist documentaries—*Les marcheuses* (1995), *2000 bonnes raisons de marcher* (1998), and *La meilleure façon de marcher* (2000)—made available on Vimeo in 2019 and 2020, GIV actively created an audiovisual memory of Quebec feminist activism.⁴⁰ These videos responded to the political impulse of documenting *La Marche du Pain et des Roses* (Bread and Roses March, or the Women's March Against Poverty) in 1995 as well as *La marche mondiale des Femmes* (World March of Women, WMW) in 2000. They draw attention to the differences beyond the national(ist) discourse and mark the transnationalization of Quebec feminism. A tension between the individual, activist experience with collective, global solidarity weaves through these works. They continually oscillate between the “intimate” locally embodied experiences of women and “global” solidarity across differences, and contrast the individual female activist participation with the collective labor of organizing public assemblies (Pratt and Rosner 2012).

These documentaries embody a compelling example of the type of participatory media culture that GIV has fostered since the 1970s and renewed throughout its history through a documentary practice that “engages, call forth, and speak to media publics for social change” (Aguayo 2019, 5). These documentary videos were produced within and for feminist organizations that mobilize for political action and they were conceived to be screened within the circuits of these organizations for self-reflection. The members of GIV who made these videos were also activists and participants in the marches. This triptych of social change documentaries both offers information about the transnational reach of Quebec feminist organizations, and a politics of representation. The films show labour of feminist political organizing and the materiality of sustaining relational connections and of creating community through care.⁴¹

⁴⁰ “The World March of Women was initiated by the francophone Quebec women's movement”, according to Chantal Maillé, who explains, from a critical perspective, the possibility for Quebec feminism, historically quite reluctant to include Indigenous and other minority women, to organize a transnational network outside the alliances created by the English language. (Maillé 2012, 72).

⁴¹ Aguayo argues for an understanding of social change documentary beyond “intention and aesthetics”, but defined “by its agency and the action...transformative potential in concrete historical context” (Aguayo 2019, 6). The documentaries analyzed in this section were produced by Federation des Femmes du Quebec to examine the project

However, the exhibition on streaming platforms reanimates these documentaries created for immediate social change. They now become historical audiovisual documents that bear witness of feminist political work and activist organizing.⁴²

Les marcheuses documents and narrates the 1995 Bread and Roses March organized by the Fédération des femmes du Québec (FFQ).⁴³ The linear temporal structure of the documentary reflects the March itself, which begins with an informative sequence on the genesis of the March, its grassroots impulse and demands, stressing the participation of disabled, lesbian, and Indigenous women. Moreover, through use of archival images and francophone voiceover, the documentary situates the march within a genealogy of struggles against poverty and exclusion, such as the textile workers' 1912 strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Led by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) Local Union 20, the largely immigrant and female workers in Lawrence demanded "bread and roses," or the improvement of working conditions and a material and qualitative lifestyle.⁴⁴ The next section consists of close-up interviews women at the march (either in cars following the column, or at moments of break), who relate their personal experiences with poverty, and articulate how neoliberal politics disproportionately affect all women no matter their level of education, work, and housing. Between interviews, the film offers shots of the communal experience of the march, taken during social lunches and moments of rest from the fatigue of walking the two-hundred kilometers. Women share and care-take, sing and dance, speaking many different languages. During the last sequence of the documentary, the contingent finally arrives in Quebec City and demand reforms from the Quebec government. Representatives of Quebec's government address the crowd and make promises that were never

and the results of political actions, thus serving the need of the specific feminist community in Quebec. For this reason, they rely on realist documentary conventions of *cinéma-vérité*, including interviews, collective debates, and the recording of militant actions unfolding in the public sphere.

⁴² In this respect, the operations of remediation, through which videos are digitized, and recontextualization, through which the newly digitized material is presented within new discourses, create a renewed memory of GIV's history of feminist media.

⁴³ The Fédération des Femmes du Québec is a non-profit feminist organization founded in 1966 whose mandate is "the transformation of social relations based on sex and the elimination of power relations in all spheres, with the aim to promote fully autonomy for women and the acknowledgement of their contribution to society" (Fédération des Femmes du Québec, n.d.).

⁴⁴ As many workers of different nationalities participated in the strike, the organizing committee arranged translations of the strike meetings ("St John, IWW). The strike was described by Justus Ebert in *The Trial of a New Society* (1913).

met. Françoise David, chair of the FFQ at the time, expresses her disappointment at their inaction but recognizes the March's importance as a mobilization action.⁴⁵

2000 bonne raisons de marcher (2000 Modes of Marching) documents the October 1998 International Preparatory Meeting in Montreal for the World March of Women. After the 1995 United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing, Québec feminists proposed to organize an international women's march, and formed a Coordinating Committee. They invited one-hundred and forty representatives from sixty-five countries to help plan a global movement to protest violence against women and global poverty. As explained by Chantalle Maillé, they planned the March between March 8, International Women's Day and October 17, 2000, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.⁴⁶ The documentary, produced by the FFQ, has a more instructive and promotional tone. It uses archival footage, and interviews with women who share their perspectives on poverty and violence, globalization, and the actions needed to demand better living standards. Video technology provides an apt medium to capture the political action. The film is organized into seven sections, each presenting a different facet of the march's history and organization. The video begins with images of the preparatory meeting, while representatives from different countries, including Françoise Davis, introduce the rationale for the meeting: redistribution of wealth and space for women in decision-making processes. Following the introductory sequence, a voice-over contextualizes the Montreal meeting and the World March of Women (WMW) within a history of transnational women's social movements and struggles. Archival footage from militant documentaries in GIV's catalogue illustrates their global marches (Chile, South Africa, Brazil, Algeria) against war, or for the right to vote or to have an abortion.⁴⁷ These films depict women's struggles as embodied in protests through the creative physical occupation of the public sphere.⁴⁸ This reproduces the mandate of the WMW as expressed by the

⁴⁵ Some titles layered over the final images of the documentary summarize the Quebec's government responses to the March's demands.

⁴⁶ "In October 1998, 140 representatives from 65 countries met in Montreal, at the invitation of the Coordinating Committee of the March, composed of women from Quebec. This preparatory meeting adopted the march's platform of world demands and developed a plan of action for the global mobilization. The two themes of the march were adopted: elimination of poverty in the world and elimination of violence against women. [...] Women decided that the march would begin on 8 March 2000, International Women's Day and end on 17 October 2000, International Day for the Eradication of Poverty" (Maillé 2012, 72).

⁴⁷ Within this history, the *Marche du pain and des roses* was the he natural culmination of a long history of struggle, as well as the direct predecessor to the World March of Women in 2000.

⁴⁸ It is worth providing a short description of the videos from which archival images are used in *2000 bonnes facons de marcher*. *No me olvides* (Tatiana Gaviola 1988) is a documentary on the protest organized by the collective

FFQ: “What we want is to highlight the common demands and initiatives issuing from the global women’s movement relating to issues of poverty and violence against women” (Fédération des femmes du Québec 1999). The diverse voice-over emphasizes the participants’ varied racial and socio-political backgrounds, which illustrates an intersectional meaning of solidarity against structural economic exclusion and recognizes the differences in their privilege. The subsequent four sequences each concern the different demands made by different geographic coalitions. The first group, countries in the Global South, addresses structural adjustment programs, the feminization of poverty, salary inequality, and discrimination at work and home. The second group, countries recently at war, discuss women’s conditions after the war. The third group, bringing together Québec, Canada, and Nigeria, discuss domestic violence within marriage, as well as divorce, abandonment of home, and welfare. Finally the last group, India and Indonesia, discusses rape as a political weapon. Each group is introduced with a black intertitle featuring the symbol for “women’s power” and a list of the interviewees’ home countries. Each woman is framed similarly, in a medium, frontal shot, but they all speak their own language, with French subtitles below. This formal choice, I argue, regroups geographical areas around common experiences, conveying the specificity of feminisms and individualized *loci* of oppression, yet also the means to overcome language barriers, different cultures, and access to resources to create a globalized network of activist solidarity. After establishing the premise for the common project of uniting women of the world, the film then documents the meeting itself. Women take the floor to give voice to the specificities of certain groups, such as lesbians, Indigenous people, to discuss the creative, collective acts involved in organizational work, and to reflect on globalization’s disproportionate effect on women’s living conditions. At the end of the film, the voice-over invites women from all countries to prepare themselves for a globally coordinated March to be held on October 17, 2000.

Mujeres por la Vida during which women marched with paper silhouettes to remember the people persecuted and made to disappear during Pinochet’s dictatorship in Chile. *Women Arise* (Federation of Transvaal Women 1986) focuses on a domestic worker within the broader context of women workers’ struggles in South Africa. Maria Angelica Lemos’s *Planeta Femea* (1994) is a documentary realized on behalf of the Coalizao de Mulheres Brasileiras along with other Brazilian non-profit organizations to capture the experience of a tent set up during the Global Forum where women from around the world met to discuss propositions to save the Planet. Finally Ahmed Lalleem’s *Algeriennes, 30 ans après* (1996) is a documentary made up of interviews with women that tell of the deceptions and struggles against obscurantism 30 years after the Algerian Independence. The same women were also interviewed by the same filmmaker in the documentary *Elles* (Lalleem 1966) where the young women had shared their hopes following Algerian Independence and their negotiations across ideas of emancipation with tradition.

The March itself is the subject of the last documentary, Petunia Alves and Ryofa Chung's *La meilleure façon de marcher* (2001), which took place in New York City on October 17, 2000. It depicts WMW's local, national, and global actions taken to protest poverty and violence (Maillé 2012, 72). The caption below the video describes it as "the multiple realities of women in the region of Montreal, which end up resembling those of the women in the world."⁴⁹ This reflects WMW's "desire to unite women of the world around a common project with a francophone leadership from Quebec" (Maillé 2012, 72). The film depicts the interconnections between groups, and the vacillation between the local and global. Various women are interviewed who each describe how their different organizations address the needs of different groups, such as immigrants, lesbians, sex workers, and Indigenous women.⁵⁰ There is also footage from the march and demonstration in front of the United Nations Building in New York City, most notably, scenes of women exchanging informational pamphlets. Between the interviews and footage, are interspersed globalization imagery, for example television and urban screens, stock graphics, tourist shots, or the sound of a modem connecting to the internet, is interspersed throughout. The film's editing reflects how the labour of solidarity and collective organization scales between local and global. Shots of the New York demonstration are followed by the continuation of the assembly in Montreal, or the March's occupation of the public sphere. The movement and variety of action reflects what Françoise Davis claims: "Women share the same analysis of capitalism and patriarchy. The strategies might be different, but the aim is the same."

Whether or not the WMW instituted a lasting transnational solidarity within to Francophone feminism (Maillé 2012, 74), or made concrete solutions to its demands (Conway 2008, 214), these three documentaries, made within video technology's flexible production structures and exhibited on streaming platforms, circulate the embodied memory particular to a moment in the history of feminism in Quebec. These films and their mode of circulation project an image of grassroots transnational feminist organizing that counters the traditional narrative of Quebec feminism's entanglement with Quebec nationalism and the sovereign movement.

GIV thus uses its curated streaming platform to put into conversation different thematically linked videos. This curatorial work is, on the one hand, a crucial activity to promote videos and ensure remuneration to the artists. On the other, it is a way to maintain and sustain

⁴⁹ GIV, Caption to *La meilleure façon de marcher* on Vimeo, accessed June 2, 2020 <https://vimeo.com/391299739>.

⁵⁰ Including the difficulty for francophone women to access job opportunities and social services in Ontario.

GIV's feminist and queer public through its collection. As described by artistic director Annaëlle Winand, GIV's collection is not a "passive" archive of audiovisual content; instead, it constitutes a "lively assortment" whose new meaning is determined by art curators and programmers (Winand 2022). The selection of videos to be uploaded and distributed online is accompanied by a zealous promotional communication strategy on GIV's social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram) and through periodic email newsletters that announce the videos made available online with information on the artist and, in the case of video programs, with the curator's statement that justify the selection of works brought together. These texts often situate the videos to make them immediately relevant, often stressing the historical resonances of GIV or, more broadly, of feminism and other social movements. This promotional communication entails a work of care in educating and preserving cultural memory that is not visible on the streaming platforms themselves, which instead seem to hide, if not erase, the large intellectual, emotional, and technical labour behind the decision of distributing videos online, especially for a small staff like GIV.

Conclusion

The strength of the videos in GIV's collection emerges in their remediation and recontextualization on Vimeo and VUCAVU. Such practices transform the distribution ecology of independent media in two ways. Streaming platforms amplify video technology's historical ability to challenge mainstream structures of media production and representation. Whether or not Vimeo and VUCAVU are ideally suited for feminist modes of activist and experimental video exhibition due to their technological limitations and regulatory practices, GIV's use of those streaming sites ensures diversity within mainstream media's circulation of feminist discourses. This chapter has focused on the interrelation between feminist video-making histories and video streaming technology in order to demonstrate how the activity of a distribution organization, like GIV, can adapt within a global media ecology by strengthening its transnational drive beyond its local territorial dimension. Rooted in the specific context of Quebec but maintaining an infrastructure open to technological change, GIV promotes and creates opportunity of interrelatedness that challenges the dominant narrative about the lack of intersectionality in Quebec feminism and instead bolsters the possibility of coalitional and transnational feminist politics.

From the 1970s through the present, GIV has played a crucial role in reshaping the feminist media landscape in Quebec through the promotion of local artists with transnational feminist perspectives. Its longevity is reflected in its extensive and varied video archive that spans over forty years, which traces the history of Quebec feminism and activist video practice that GIV has recorded and participated in. Both documentary and experimental works celebrate the diversity of women's film, across different generations, contexts, and theme: "Le GIV est intéressé par les œuvres témoignant d'un féminisme sans cesse revisité, qui englobe tous les combats concernant les groupes opprimés, marginalisés et sous-représentés," writes current artistic co-director Annaëlle Winand (2022). GIV's distribution and exhibition practices on streaming platforms demonstrate continuity in the use of media technology to produce social and political intervention. Although questions of accessibility may limit a truly global reach, online streaming prompts a renewed circulation of content selected from GIV's catalogue, which remediates the cultural memory of Quebec feminist practices of video-making and political organizing. GIV's curatorial activity and scope of circulation reconsiders the specificity of Quebec feminism yet presents a history of feminist action not bounded by nationalist, identitarian, francophone interests and goals, but rather deeply rooted in transnational, diverse, global networks.

As a way of conclusion, I would like to quote again artistic co-director Annaëlle Winand, who succinctly illustrates GIV's own understanding of its mediation role between artists and public, and consequent definition of feminism as a radical approach to redefine socio-political relations:

Nos préoccupations, féministes, sont plutôt du ressort communautaire : elles se concrétisent dans les services que nous rendons aux artistes, dans les communautés avec lesquelles nous interagissons ainsi que dans les activités et les programmations que nous mettons sur pied. Elles constituent le moteur de nos activités. Il s'agit d'une réflexion constante, qui se renouvelle au fil de nos interventions : si nous organisons des événements réguliers pour maintenir une présence dans différentes communautés, il faut par ailleurs compléter ce travail

en empruntant de nouvelles voies, en rencontrant de nouveaux artistes et de nouveaux publics ou encore en entrant en contact avec de nouveaux types d'œuvres. (Winand 2022)⁵¹

In this respect, all the aspects of the history and the work of GIV illustrated in this chapter – its role as an archive of feminist and video histories, its particular understanding of doing feminism through technology, its centrality in participating and fostering transnational feminist approaches in Quebec – contribute to the articulation of a feminist discourse grounded in a form of care for community-building and, thus, attest to a commitment to create alternative economies and affective social and cultural relations within the larger context of neoliberal discourse of gender equality.

⁵¹ “Our feminist concerns are actually community concern: they materialize in the services that we provide to artists, in the communities with which we interact as well as in the activities and programs that we set up. [...] This [our understanding of feminism] is a constant reflection, which is renewed over the course of our interventions: if we organize regular events to maintain a presence in different communities, we must also complete this work by taking new paths, by meeting new artists and new audiences or by coming into contact with new types of works” (Author’s translation).

CHAPTER 2

Chloé Robichaud, Sophie Deraspe, Geneviève Dulude-De Celles: Women Auteurs on the International Film Festival Circuit¹

At the 2021 Gala Québec Cinéma, a yearly award ceremony for Quebec francophone cinema, Anaïs Barbeau-Lavalette won Best Picture for her film *La déesse des mouches à feu* (2020), an adaptation of Quebec writer Geneviève Pettersen's homonymous novel. Set in Saguenay, a city in rural Chicoutimi Saguenay-Lac St Jean, in the 1990s, the film follows teenage Catherine (played by Kelly Depeault) as she navigates her parent's divorce, and rebels through sex, drugs, and Doc Martens. Her parents' relationship reflects the brutality between white Quebeckers and Indigenous peoples, shown when her father denigrates her mother's temperament because of her "sang Kawish." The film begins on her sixteenth birthday, when her parents separate after a violent fight. Catherine escapes the familial conflict by making a new group of friends at school. They spend time in parking lots and skateboard parks, the nonplaces of rural Quebec, listening to music and doing drugs, which soon escalates in despair and accidental tragic loss. The opening sequence of the film, when Catherine opens her birthday gifts in front of her parents, is not only paradigmatic of the entire cruel tone of the film, but also situates the narrative of the film and Catherine's lifestyle within transnational youth subculture. Her mother gives Catherine *Zoo Station: The Story of Christian F.*, a staple of youth subculture.² The book not only prefigures the protagonist's future drug addiction, but also connects Catherine's experience to historical and global youth culture. Thus, the film offers a transnational cinematic representation of youth subculture, negotiating Catherine's local specificity with the global genre of the "teen film" (Shary and Seibel 2006; Chareyron and Viennot 2021). In particular, the film tackles youth femininity, with its unfixed quality, both as the starting point for undoing conventional gender roles in Quebec and the site for the construction of an identity that refuses to be contained within

¹ In Summer 2020, Micheal Gott and Thibaut Schilt sent out a call for chapters for their new edited collection *Quebec Cinema in the 21st Century*, set out to "investigate the inherently global nature of Quebec's film industry and cinematic output over the past 20 years." For that call, I sent out a chapter proposal that would investigate contemporary configurations of women's cinema in Quebec that circulate within the international festival circuit. For the chapter published in the edited collection, I could only focus on two filmmakers: Chloé Robichaud and Sophie Deraspe. I then included in my corpus the case study of Geneviève Dulude-De Celles. I presented part of this research as a guest lecturer in Michael Gott's seminar at University of Cincinnati and at the graduate conference "Arts&Médias" at Université de Montréal in November 2021.

² This book autobiographically chronicles the life of Christiane Felscherinow between 1975 and 1978, aged 12–15, and her heroin addiction in Berlin with a group of friends. The book was famously adapted into a film directed by Uli Edel in 1981.

national(ist) themes and concerns as it is, instead, shaped by “worldly” influences. *La déesse des mouche à feu* is representative of contemporary configurations of women’s cinema in Quebec, characterized by phenomenological explorations of the world from the perspective of embodied feminine characters that negotiate their identities outside hegemonic preoccupations of essentialist national belongings.

In her acceptance speech, Anaïs Barbeau-Lavalette spoke about being woman filmmaker in the Quebec film industry and asserted an alternative way of looking. “We make films that look like us, according to our taste, our way of directing, the world is going to adapt to us,” she said.³ Access for women filmmakers in the Quebec film industry, Barbeau-Lavalette argued, is not only a matter of presence and visibility, but also a matter of reinventing the imaginary of Quebec cinema outside the dominant perspective of the masculine subject. Her speech addresses two major characteristics of the current generation of women filmmakers in Quebec. First, when promoting their films, they assert their gender-specific positions to reclaim a space for women filmmakers in Quebec film industry. Second, their films tell stories that challenge restrictive gender roles and situate traditional concerns of Quebec national identity in conversation with global and transnational perspectives.

La déesse des mouche à feu premiered in February 2020 at the 70th Berlin International Film Festival. Like other many other Quebec-produced films, it successfully circulated in prestigious film festivals, because it combined a local “accent” with transnational cinematic aesthetics that appealed to high-brow festival audiences. Since the 2000s, film scholar Bill Marshall notes, Quebec cinema went through a radical transformation including a “greater success at the domestic box office, increased international recognition by audiences and through awards, and the more visible presence of Quebec filmmakers in Hollywood and international production” (2019, 252).⁴ The international recognition that Quebec cinema has received in the last twenty-five years is associated with the critical and commercial success of films directed by a

³ Here in French the complete quote of the acceptance speech: “Je veux parler à elles, nous les femmes, les filles. Nos voix ont pris du temps à émerger, elles ont toujours été là, et puis enfin elles arrivent. On fait des films qui nous ressemblent, on fait des films à notre façon, on a notre façon de diriger les acteurs, on a notre façon de mettre en scène, c’est déstabilisant pour ceux qui nous entourent parce que on vient d’arriver. Nous ne transformons pas, je me parle autant qu’à vous toutes, le cadre s’adaptera à nous et non l’inverse, et le monde sera juste plus beau, plus vaste. Merci, continuons”. (Québec Cinéma 2021, min 01:35)

⁴ Similarly, in 2013, in the Special Issue of the *American Review of Canadian Studies* dedicated to Quebec Cinema, the editors had noticed: “since the turn of the millennium [...] Quebec cinema has managed to produce a sustained flow of both critical and commercial successes that consistently earn more than 10 percent of the box office receipts in the province” (Santoro et al. 2013, 158).

new generation of filmmakers such as Denis Villeneuve, Jean Marc Vallée, Philippe Falardeau, Kim Nguyen, Denis Côté, and Xavier Dolan, who have developed reputations as marketable and acclaimed auteurs within the context of global cinema and the international festival circuit. Film festivals especially have contributed to the circulation of the films of this generation of filmmakers and fuelled a critical and academic discourse on the potential for Quebec cinema to articulate locally and linguistically specific narratives, themes, and tropes for global audiences (Baillergeon and Bertrand 2019; Dequen et al. 2011).⁵ Film festivals have provided these filmmakers with international exposure, which in turn brought domestic recognition and prestige and ensured a relative box-office success especially within the circuit of art-house theatres. While there has been a growing body of scholarship that looked at the global turn in Quebec cinema, this has largely focused on the international fame of male Quebec directors and has not addressed how film festivals provide crucial platforms to advance women filmmakers' careers. Similarly, work on Quebec women's cinema has myopically focused on its local reception and has not situated it within global film festival circuits. This chapter aims to rectify this twofold oversight. I examine Chloé Robichaud, Sophie Deraspes, and Genevieve Dulude-De Celles whose films were widely circulated within the international film festival circuit, negotiate local cinematic traditions, formally and thematically, and depict narratives of migrations, displacement, border-crossing, and internal intercultural encounters, while foregrounding "eccentric subjects."⁶ These themes, when seen on an international stage, articulate new femininities within the space of Quebec that reject hegemonic and territorialized notions of national identity. Even if two of the films analyzed in this chapter ultimately centre on the experience of white francophone women in Quebec, they demonstrate an interest in marginalized subjectivities. Using embodied perspectives, their films avoid universalist claims about gender and femininity. They also privilege the realm of intimate relationships (romantic, familial, and friendly) as the sphere where larger political affiliations and solidarity can be enacted. These

⁵ Of course, at least since 1963, when Perrault's *Pour la suite du monde* was presented in the official competition at Cannes International Film Festival, Quebec films have circulated within the international film festival circuit. However, the new wave of films from Quebec that successfully circulate within international film festivals seem to defy an essentialist definition of "national cinema" in two main ways: first, by articulating transnational narratives that stage intercultural encounters and border crossing within, across, and beyond the national space and, second, self-reflectively examining the relations between the local and the global (Santoro et al. 2013, Baillergeon and Bertrand 2019, Bachand 2019). Among these films, some of the most exemplary titles are *Incendies* (Denis Villeneuve, 2010), *Rebelle* (Kim Nguyen, 2012), *Inch'Allah* (Anais Barbeau-Lavalette, 2012). Both *Incendies* and *Rebelle* were nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film.

⁶ This is a subject position theorized by Teresa de Lauretis, on which I will elaborate in the conclusions.

films redefine the borders and the preoccupations of Quebec society and history, and address colonial power relations in Quebec beyond an obsolete nationalist rhetoric that historically only considered the subject position of the Quebecois as “colonized” in relation to federal Canada. In this respect, the work of these filmmakers contribute to new feminist approaches to filmmaking—even though they do not necessarily identify their practice in these terms—by presenting an ethical dimension as they dramatize gestures of interconnectedness, solidarity, and reciprocal care.

While gender-specific, my approach to Quebec transnational cinema is not gender essentializing insofar as I position the work of women filmmakers in continuity within the tradition of women’s cinema in Quebec and internationally. In her survey of contemporary developments of feminist film practices in Quebec, Brenda Longfellow notes “cine-feminism has continuously evolved since the 1970s to adapt to new policy environments, changing discourses of feminism, and through the evolution of new platforms of dissemination, production and funding” (2019). The new generation of women filmmakers to which Longfellow refers counter established cinematic conventions and normative understandings of politics and the nation. Women’s cinema since the 1970s “has put into question dominant masculine narratives of the nation in Quebec” (Longfellow 2019). These contemporary filmmakers expand beyond the nation and address femininities within and beyond the boundaries of national or cultural identity of Quebec (Nadeau 1999).⁷ Patricia White, in her study of transnational women’s cinema of the twenty-first century, writes, “women filmmakers from all over the world are navigating institutional politics and making films that have a chance to travel and be seen. Though inevitably shaped and constrained by economic and ideological forces both local and global, in its publicity and circulation this work projects a transnational feminist social vision” (White 2015, 4–5). In her book, White investigates “how current institutions and cultures of world cinema position women’s directors work—and different women’s work—differently” and “how feminist politics has affected these shifts” (17). I take White’s affirmation as a starting point to analyse how women filmmakers from Quebec are expressing renewed feminist concerns from their specific

⁷ In the specific context of Quebec, women’s cinema has historically constituted the field that has contested heteronormative, patriarchal, and masculinist narratives in Quebec cinema. Drawing on Marshall, Longfellow has noted that “in Quebec popular films ... the narratives frequently incorporate obsessions with masculinity as a failed ideal compensated only through homosocial bonding or (male) oedipal trajectories” (Longfellow 2019). Moreover, Quebec’s “author cinema” has also been historically preoccupied with narratives and themes of national identity from a strictly masculine perspective (Marshall 2001; Massimi 2016). Against this context, women’s and queer cinema have countered strong masculine values expressed in Quebec’s nationalism.

geo-linguistic perspective. I adopt her analysis to focus not just on how the thematic and narrative concerns of transnational francophone cinema shape women's cinema, but also the material conditions of their circulation.

In this respect, I draw on the concept of "*cinéma-monde*," a decentering approach that highlights the distinctiveness of transnational francophone cinema from a more general category of world cinema. Bill Marshall (2012, 35) coined the term, adapting the concept of *littérature-monde* which described a corpus of works open to the world that address cosmopolitanism, polyphony, creolization, and hybridity.⁸ While recognizing the colonial legacy of francophonie, the term *cinéma-monde* has the potential to decenter power relations implicit in 'francophone cinema' and to bring forward French-language regional flows of cinematic production and circulation as a "subset of transnational cinema" (Higbee 2019). Thibaut Schilt and Michael Gott (2019) adopt the framework of *cinéma-monde* to examine the circuits of production, distribution, and exhibition of French-language cinema in the world.⁹ Thematically, *cinéma-monde* is concerned with "borders, movement, language, and lateral connections" (Marshall 2012, 42), as well as with "contact zones, cross-national, regional and diasporic narratives" (Higbee 2019, 341). Recently, Weber-Fève (2021) has brought out the "ethical dimension" implicit in *cinéma-monde*, situated in "interconnectedness and polycentrism" (Ennaïli 2019), in "gestures of solidarity" and "interest in others" (Gott and Schilt 2019), and in the "erasure of the self/other binary in favor of a recognition of mutual entanglements [...] marked by profound inequalities of power" (Marshall 2019, 326). The concept of *cinéma-monde* therefore offers a critical lens to assess how Quebec cinema travels within transnational circuits and both critiques nationalist

⁸ Published in 2007 in the French newspaper *Le Monde*, the manifesto "Pour une *littérature-monde* en français" was written and signed by forty-five non-metropolitan French writers who recognized the emergence of a literature in French delinked from French national project and argued for the outdateness of the separation between French and francophone. They wrote: "L'émergence d'une littérature-monde en langue française consciemment affirmée, ouverte sur le monde, transnationale, signe l'acte de décès de la francophonie. Personne ne parle le francophone, ni n'écrit en francophone. [...] Littérature-monde parce que, à l'évidence multiples, diverses, sont aujourd'hui les littératures de langue françaises de par le monde, formant un vaste ensemble dont les ramifications enlacent plusieurs continents."

⁹ Introducing a recent issue of *Contemporary French Civilization* dedicated to recent developments in cinema-monde, Gott has further sketched out the differences between world cinema and cinema-monde: "'cinéma-monde' is not the same as 'world cinema' because it specifically encompasses transnational cinema that fits into at least one of three sometimes overlapping categories: 1) francophone film from anywhere in the world (flexibly defined to include multilingual productions), 2) productions from the French-speaking world, which may or may not be francophone, and 3) films made within spheres that implicate the Frenchspeaking world on some level. To think in terms of cinéma-monde involves looking across these categories to critically assess film industries, funding schemes, distribution networks, and narratives [...]" (Gott 2022, 2). In this respect, "cinéma-monde" is conceived as a flexible container that has the potential to confront and interrogate the boundaries of what has constituted French and francophone film studies, starting from the very refusal to create a hierarchy between "French" and "francophone."

discourse and internal power relations within francophone Quebec. By gendering *cinéma-monde*, I look into how Quebec contemporary women's cinema, shaped both by local feminist film cultures and broader global cinema institutions as the international film festival circuit, expands *cinéma-monde*'s critique to colonial understandings of francophonie, privileging women's embodied perspectives.

The theorization of *cinéma-monde* is particularly relevant in the context of Quebec cinema as far as it permits to expand on anti-essentialist understanding of national cinema. The idea of national cinema as a "self-contained and carefully demarcated experience" has been extensively challenged with more flexible, contingent, and instable constructions of the "national" (Higson 1995, 58). While national cinemas are a crucial framework to assess any film industry, especially regarding state policies that determine access to film funding and film distribution, they are not valuable as a prescriptive understanding of the nation as a "finite, limited space, inhabited by a tightly coherent and unified community, closed off to other identities besides national identity" (Higson 1995, 60).¹⁰ In the specific case of Quebec, Bill Marshall posits an understanding of the film texts of Quebec national cinema, and of any national cinema, as "national-allegorical tensions:"

'National' film texts are thus always inevitably pluralized and even destabilized by the competing discourses of and on the nation that exist in the culture and polity, the work of esthetic form on non-esthetic (ideological) discourses, and the contradictions and paradoxes inherent in the idea of the nation itself" (2001, 3)

In other words, rather than being solely allegories of a national project and identity, film texts must be situated within socio-political historical contexts of national context determined by "forces of assertion and dispersal, homogeneity and heterogeneity" (Marshall, 2019).¹¹

¹⁰ Established theorizations of national cinema in film studies (Hayward 2000, Higson 2000, Hjort 2007, Willemsen 2006) have largely drawn on Benedict Anderson's understanding of the emergence of the nation-state as a result of modernity and of the idea of the nation as an "imagined community," a construction of a group that share some sense of cultural belonging tied to a space (Anderson 1983).

¹¹ Bill Marshall, in his broader discussion of film texts as "national-allegorical tensions" that provide polysemic and pluralized discourses of the nation, acknowledges the viability of the term "women's cinema" as a lens to address the analysis of gender constructions in Quebec cinema (2001, 208). Marshall individuates women's cinema as the space in which gender identities are investigated "through their being put into some kind of reflexive discourse" (2001, 210).

Discussions on Quebec national cinema have often conflated films from this province with the preoccupation for the construction of a national identity, deemed uncertain, unachieved, and menaced (Poirier 2004). This understanding of Quebec cinema within the parameters of a national(ist) rhetoric depends mostly on the development of a consistent cinematic production from the late 1950s and later through the 1960s in the wake of *la Revolution tranquille* (Marshall 2001; Portelance 2016). Quebec national cinema in the 1960s was committed, especially through a “cinema direct” approach, to creating an original Quebec national identity representing a new society. It collected and expressed collective anxieties and dissatisfaction vis-à-vis the nationalist project through allegorical narratives. However, according to Bill Marshall’s periodization of Quebec cinema, the 1990s constitute “a new turn in the contemporary period, in which the ever-present exigencies of the “national” [...] have to contend with the inescapability of a globalized economy of cultures, identities, and cinematic practices” (2001, 133).¹² This new turn is characterized by an increasing presence of themes of interculturality, hybridity, multilingualism, and border-crossing narratives in films produced within the province.

Many scholarly works have looked at “these new narrative patterns [that] have sidelined the sovereigntist project in favour of a “global, decentered sense of interconnectedness,” as Marshall phrases it (Marshall 2019). In a recent issue of *Contemporary French Civilization*, guest editors Mercedes Baillergeon and Karine Bertrand situate the development of these new narratives within a “post-referendum age characterized by open borders, globalization, and increased immigration” (137) and write:

Le cinéma et les (nouveaux) médias québécois semblent s’être transformés, particulièrement au niveau de la manière dont ils articulent les questions d’identité nationale et de souveraineté, en s’ouvrant davantage au monde qui existe par-delà ses frontières de plus en plus perméables, tout en demeurant fortement ancrés dans la tradition cinématographique, la politique et la culture québécoise. (2019, 138).¹³

Similarly, in his analysis of the road-movie genre in Quebec, Thibaut Schilt writes:

¹² The two failed referenda for Quebec independency from federal Canada, in 1980 and 1995, are two further crucial dates that marked Quebec cinema with narratives of *impasse*, incertitude, and unachieved maturity.

¹³ “Quebec cinema and new media appear transformed, especially in terms of how they articulate the issues of national identity and sovereignty: they open up more and more to the world that exists beyond Quebec’s borders, which are increasingly permeable, while they remained connected to Quebec cinematic tradition, culture, and politics” (Author’s translation)

Since the 1990s films produced in the province have arguably been less visibly preoccupied with defining Quebecoise identity, as opposed to films made during both the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s and the sovereignty debates in the 1970s and 1980s. Instead, contemporary directors from Quebec have been more inclined to devise crowd-pleasing opuses of various genres that thrive locally, and with ever more frequency, on the international scene (2019, 192).

These accounts of transnationalism in Quebec cinema in the 21st century have mostly avoided a gender-informed analysis thus not examining the specificities of women's cinema. In other words, the gendered dimensions of both the transnational circulation of Quebec cinema and of the ways in which the question of identity is being redefined thematically and stylistically in the film texts themselves have not been explored.

Women's cinema is a useful concept to define the distinctiveness of women's filmmaking from a feminist standpoint, and to place its politics, as well as the material contexts of cinematic production and distribution in the work of women directors (Butler 2002; McHugh 2009; White 2015; Maule 2016). The feminist notion of authorship, central to theorizing female subjectivity and agency, is fundamental to conceptualizing the distinctiveness of women's cinema outside of essentialist frameworks. Interrogating the viability of "women's cinema" as a grand critical approach, the editors of the collection *On Women's Films: Across Worlds and Generations* propose a reassessment of the question of authorship "at a microlevel" and invite to analyse "how women figure, conform, and conceptualize their views on relationships, on social, national and global issues: how they define, in the realm of film language, particular emphases, detours, temporalities; how they convey through gesture, narrative, and tone the psychic and intellectual forces driving them" (Margoulis and Szaniawski 2019, 7). Overcoming a limited understanding of authorship as a formalist, and historically masculine, entity to be detected in the textual strategies of the film, recent scholarship on female film authorship has moved away from an exclusive focus on the text to a discursive analysis of the filmmaker's own strategies of professional affirmation (Grant 2001).¹⁴ Alison Butler writes that "insistence on the authoring

¹⁴ Feminist theorizations of film authorship defy both a romantic understanding of the author (intended as the autonomous, self-conscious, genius) as well as post-structuralist accounts that individuate the author-function only in the film text and, hence, abstract the author from socio-historical situated contexts. In particular, Catherine Grant argues for the importance of considering the context of production, distribution, and reception of films in analysis of female authorship as a way of affirming female directors' agency within and in response to dominant and patriarchal contexts of film industries. As recently brought up by Katarzyna Paszkiewicz in her book *Genre, Authorship and*

presence of the woman outside the text is a formal and tactical necessity,” given the fact that “for female makers the act of authoring is already complicated by social conditions and cultural conventions” (Butler 2003, 61). In *Women’s Cinema, World Cinema*, Patricia White focuses on the figure of the “[global] woman director as a way to index questions central to contemporary feminism such as visibility, agency, labor, desire, and power” (White 2015, 19). White uses the notion of the auteur as a form of agency in women’s cultural production and interrogates the auteurist discourses that shape the circulation of female directors’ films in festival networks (White 2015, 33). Following White, I move beyond solely textual accounts of authorship and situate women filmmakers’ formal and cultural strategies in conversation with their position as global women filmmakers. Thus, in each of the following sections of this chapter I examine how Chloé Robichaud, Sophie Deraspe, and Genevieve Dulude-De Celles consciously construct their authorial personae and reflect on their own position as film directors in the global film industry. I then closely analyze how their respective films, *Sarah préfère la course* (*Sarah Prefers to Run*, Robichaud 2013), *Antigone* (Deraspes 2019), and *Une Colonie* (Dulude-De Celles 2019) investigate the construction of femininities in Quebec, and engage with the tension between the local/national and global. I argue that the circulation of these films within the international film festival circuit (Festival de Cannes, Toronto International Film Festival and Berlin International Film Festival respectively) play a crucial role in shaping their meaning as instances of Quebec’s self-questioning of its identitarian national imaginary.¹⁵ Hence, the selection of these three films,

Contemporary Women Filmmakers: “Grants suggests that instead of shifting attention from formal structures and the style of film texts, we should broaden our ideas about what constitutes a ‘primary text’ in film studies and widen the scope of those texts employed to theorize about female authorship. This means examining not only the films and the facts of the director’s life, but also interviews, film reviews, academic studies, photographs and press materials, which enable the understanding of the multiple mediations operating in the creation of the authorial figures of female directors” (2017, 38).

¹⁵ Cannes Film Festival and TIFF represent two distinct, yet fundamental nodes for the transnational circulation of Quebec cinema (Chahine 2019). Cannes has historically established art cinema in opposition to the dominance of Hollywood, and created the canons of national cinemas. This has played a crucial role in promoting the uniqueness of Quebec cinema since the 1960s. In the last few decades, this festival has continued to turn Quebec filmmakers into international auteurs (Denys Arcand, Xavier Dolan) and ensured the distribution of their films in France’s art-house cinemas circuit. TIFF, on the other hand, has promoted and shaped Canada national cinema, and showcases the specificity of francophone Quebec cinema as part of the Canadian cinematic canon for a North-American audience. In this respect, the two festivals guarantee the visibility of Quebec cinema within different frameworks and addressing multiple audiences. The Berlin International Film Festival represents yet another important node for the circulation of Quebec cinemas and ensures a broader European recognition. It is “considered the most political of all the major film festivals” (Berlinale, n.d.), and therefore offered a platform for young emerging directors and progressive cinema. Quebec films shown there have emphasized their engagement with social issues. The cultural value accrued at these festivals is in turn used to promote the films and guarantees theatrical exhibition in the domestic circuit.

among each of the filmmaker's filmography, as the centre of my analysis depends not only on their status as representative of the filmmaker's authorship, but also on their successful circulation within the international film festival circuit, which, in turn, attests to the status of *auteur* that these filmmakers have achieved.

A New Generation of Women Directors

Before considering each of my case studies separately, I would like to provide some context for Quebec's contemporary women's cinema. Chloé Robichaud, Sophie Deraspes, and Geneviève Dulude-De Celles all belong to a new generation of women filmmakers in Quebec active in the last ten to fifteen years, which includes among others, Louise Archambault, Anais Barbeau-Lavalette, Sophie Dupuis, Chloé Leriche, Anne Emond, Myriam Verrault, and Caroline Monnet.¹⁶ Even within the postfeminist cultural climate that has dismissed the relevance of feminism, this generation has undeniably benefitted from the legacy of feminist media activism.¹⁷ The tradition of women's filmmaking in Quebec, according to Chantal Nadeau, has managed "to address questions of identities outside the parameters of nationalist rhetoric, exploring instead the borders of the domestic and subjective territories and spaces as a strategy of marking differences" (1999, 198).¹⁸ Moreover, new funding opportunities for feature fiction filmmaking in

¹⁶ Although, strictly speaking, all these filmmakers are not in the same generation, they all have made at least one feature fiction film in the 2010s that has received wide critical acclaim and relative success at domestic and international box offices. Moreover, they have worked contemporaneously within the infrastructures of Quebec cinema, both in terms of film training and funding, and they do work regularly in the film and television industry.

¹⁷ Broadly speaking, postfeminism describes the position that feminism is not needed, gender equality has been reached, and therefore there is no value in proclaiming feminist political stands. Regarding postfeminism in film production, it emerged in the 1980s in the Global North concomitantly with the raising neoliberal socio-economic order. A postfeminist approach to filmmaking implies "1) a reconsideration of gender as one of the elements constituting women's subject position, to be constantly renegotiated and adapted to specific contexts and situations; and 2) a disengagement of female authorship from notions of gendered subjectivity imbricated in oppositional or binary mechanism of identity formation" (Maule 2008, 193). In the late 2010s, with the resurgence of feminist politics in the social movements #metoo and #TimesUp, there has been in part a renewed interest on behalf of women filmmakers to explicitly position themselves and their work as feminist.

¹⁸ Nadeau focuses her analysis on two films that explicitly take on modernist feminist strategies, which are *Le Vie Revée* (Mireille Danserau, 1972) and *La cuisine rouge* (Paule Baillergeon, 1979), to critique "the exclusion of women and desire from the national scene" (Nadeau 1999, 198). These two films are opposed to some films by Léa Pool that, according to Nadeau, "voluntarily non-engaged and non-confrontational, diffuse any connotation of politics or ideology traditionally associated with feminist discourses" (1999, 206). Previously, Nadeau had polemically criticized Léa Pool's early films for not politically engaging with questions of female sexuality and alterity, especially given the filmmaker's privileged position to access the means of production (1991; 1999). Notwithstanding the ambiguity that has characterised feminist film criticism in the analysis of Léa Pool, this Swiss-born filmmaker is among the most known directors working in Quebec whose films widely circulated in transnational circuits, thus constituting an important precedent for any discussion of transnational women's cinema in Quebec.

conjunction with the opening of Quebec's cinema to transnational markets and audiences have also created favourable conditions for this generation of women filmmakers to emerge and gain attention. Finally, most of these filmmakers refuse the label *cinéma de femmes*, and instead prefer to pitch their films to a wider, less niche audience, embracing a universalist perspective that does not address gender explicitly. Yet, they actively participate in new waves of feminist discourses, as they all members of *Réalisatrices Équitables*.

Isabelle Hayeur and Ève Lamont founded *Réalisatrices Équitables* in 2007 with the initiative of creating an institutional space for the advancement of women filmmakers. The non-profit organization advocates within professional circles and in mainstream newspapers for gender equality and the improvement of women's labour conditions in the Quebec film industry. *Réalisatrices Équitables* has three principal objectives: ensuring that public funding for production is allocated equally between men and women; affirming women directors' thematic and stylistic concerns in the landscape of moving images; and developing a vigilant critique of stereotyped representations of women in film. *Réalisatrices Équitables* has produced several reports that use both quantitative and qualitative data to demonstrate the disadvantages women filmmakers have in the industry: the disparity of women's films compared to men's, and the deeper cultural structures that limit, at various stages, women's advancement. *Réalisatrices Équitables'* approach to gender equality has two limitations: first, it assumes gender as the only axis of discrimination in the film industry and not other systemic forms of exclusion (namely, racism and location); second, it presupposes that women might be assimilated within the existing infrastructures of film production and distribution without radically changing them.¹⁹ Notwithstanding these limits, the work of *Réalisatrices Équitable* has undeniably had a profound impact on the new policies promulgated by the major federal and provincial funding agencies (NFB, Telefilm Canada, and SODEC). Since 2016, these agencies have expressed their commitment to attain gender parity through various approaches (Brinton 2020). In particular, in Quebec, SODEC (Société de développement des entreprises culturelles) announced, in 2017, the so-called "1+1 measure": each producer can ask funding for two projects provided that one of

¹⁹ It must be noted that within *Réalisatrices Équitable*, the Diversity Committee is engaged in promoting minority and First Nations women filmmakers. They also provide a mentorship program, "Mentorship or Workshop for Women Filmmakers who identify as Cultural or Ethnic Minority," and help create access to resources.

them is directed or scripted by a woman.²⁰ A simple glance at the statistics demonstrates a clear increase in film projects funded with women directors as well as the budgets for these productions. In 2017–18, since Telefilm and Sodec have introduced parity incentive measures, “the number of projects accepted, and budgets allocated to women directors has doubled” compared to the years 2013–16 (Réalisatrices Équitables, n.d.). These institutional changes, combined with larger conversations on the role of women in film industry such as the #metoo movement and its local ramifications, constitute a fertile ground for women film directors and producers to realize their projects. At the same time, they reinforce an image of Canadian and Quebec governments as progressive.

Réalisatrices Équitables is active not only in producing data and instigating institutional awareness on gender equality, but also in promoting the visibility of Quebec women filmmakers. They organize monthly screenings in Montreal and host an online directory of women filmmakers, *Dames Des Vues*. On the website, each filmmaker listed has a profile page with biographical information and links to access their films on various streaming platforms (including the three I focus on, Chloé Robichaud, Sophie Deraspe, and Geneviève Dulude-De Celles). By organizing their directory by individual filmmakers, Réalisatrices Équitables fosters an understanding of the *réalisatrice* (female filmmaker) mostly in terms of her exceptional authorship. Indeed, as we can read on the Réalisatrices Équitables website: “What is a female director? She is a creator. *Like her male counterparts* [my emphasis], she is an artist in charge of directing all phases of a film or TV show.... In short, she makes all the choices (sensory, visual, sound) that impact how the audience perceives and comprehends the screenplay or subject matter. In other words, the female director signs the work” (Réalisatrices Équitables, n.d.). While this definition might seem to downplay the embodied specificity of the gendered experience of women filmmakers in favor of a universalist perspective, it signals how “the notion of the auteur is a central point of identification for women filmmakers in Quebec” (Longefellow 2019). It is a strategy to assert their agency and position their work as unique. Réalisatrices Équitables cultivates an *auteurist* approach to promote the work of women directors within a framework that

²⁰ Government agencies provide independent producers with funding to make films. In March 2016, the National Film Board announced a policy according to which 50% of its productions must be directed by women and 50% of budget allocation is guaranteed to projects directed by women. Moreover, in 2017 the NFB also committed to achieve gender equality in key creative positions (screenwriting, editing, cinematography, and music composition). Telefilm Canada’s gender parity measures, announced in 2016, provide incentives for film portfolios with women in key creative roles.

does not necessarily nor explicitly claim a feminist standpoint, but that, nonetheless, recognizes the necessity of affirming women's place as creative workers in Quebec film industry.²¹ Réalisatrices Équitables's embrace of an *auteurist* approach mirrors the individual strategies that each filmmaker deploys in constructing her authorial persona. This *auteurist* approach must also be situated in conversation with the larger tradition of *cinéma d'auteur* in Quebec cinema. The emergence of a *cinéma d'auteur* in Quebec is strictly linked to the affirmation of "cinéma direct" in the 1960s and is consequently associated to national cinema. According to Marshall, "the auteurist discourse in Quebec is articulated [...] against the star and studio system of Hollywood but is also problematically linked to France" (2001, 136). The auteurist discourse in Quebec has individuated, at least since the 1970s, a corpus of authors (including Jutra, Lefebvre, Carles, Forcier, Arcand) that interrogated Quebec society and have contributed, through their films, to the construction of national identity and narratives. However, the particularity of Quebec's *auteur* cinema, especially when compared to France, is that it has also been popular and attracted a wide domestic audience (Marshall 2001, 137). Moreover, *cinéma d'auteur* in Quebec is also associated with an artisanal ethos that has historically been promulgated by funding mechanisms, both within the provincial chapter of NFB and other provincial funding agencies, that try to preserve "the cultural specificity" of a national cinema and the originality of the local industry as opposed to Hollywood domination and French cultural models as well. Finally, the *auteur* of Quebec cinema is a marketing figure shaped the filmmakers themselves as a strategy of professional affirmation and by reception frameworks within international film festivals.

Within this context, Chloé Robichaud, Sophie Deraspes, and Geneviève Dulude-De Celles occupy a unique position because of their exposure and access to the networks and institutions of global cinema. Dominant discourses on authorship as a marker of genius and ownership frame the reception of these filmmakers and their films within the international film festival circuit, emphasizing their exceptionality as women and branding them as success stories. In turn, Robichaud and Deraspes use their privileged status and visibility as acclaimed *auteurs* to discuss their own formation, experiences, and working conditions in navigating the mechanisms of Quebec film industry as women. While they appeal to a broad audience and mostly deny any

²¹ The tendency to detach explicit discourses of feminism from women's filmmaking practices is not uncommon within francophone film culture: in particular, women filmmakers in France usually downplay their gender and do not engage with feminist film theory as mostly developed in Anglophone film criticism and scholarship. (Tarr and Rollet 2001, 1–2).

explicit political affiliation with women's cinema, they also articulate their commitment in foregrounding trajectories of female subjects in their films and intervening in the masculinist imaginary of Quebec cinema. As I hope to demonstrate in the following sections, these filmmakers deploy the language of film to explore women's embodied perspectives and their relation to normative construction of the nation.

Although these filmmakers do not claim affinities among each other, they are self-conscious about their belonging to a group of female directors internationally acclaimed for redefining identities and imaginaries through their films. By studying these filmmakers together, while still addressing the specificities of each one of them, I try to minimize an individualized approach that might de-historicize the impact of feminist film culture on their practice. Instead, I stress the interplay of modes of film production and circulation and of feminist discourses in shaping their work. Even when they receive major funding, these filmmakers still foster an artisanal production culture: they value artistic collaborations with other women (in many instances, professionals formed at the same film schools they attended) and they opt to work with small production companies. After their films circulate in the major festivals, they are distributed in the francophone art-house circuit, mostly in Quebec and in France, and are increasingly present on specialized streaming platforms.²² In this respect, the circulation of their films occupy a "minor" position vis-à-vis mainstream circuits of distribution in Canada and North America, but it also acknowledges the privileged flows of exchange within francophonie. This circulation amplifies the meaning of these films that thematically address the tensions between local and global, explore the borders of identity formation in Quebec, and decentralize normative understanding of space and hegemonic mechanisms of separation between the private and the political.

In particular, the analysis will focus on two elements: the filmmakers' use of gender-specific and feminist positions in the promotion of their films to advance the cause of women filmmakers in Quebec film industry; and their foregrounding "eccentric subjects" in their work, as Teresa de Lauretis calls female characters that defy normative constructions of femininity (1990). Following this premise, I argue, they criticize the gender-biased and unequal context of

²² I am grateful to Thibaut Schilt for making me notice, during one of the revisions of this chapter, that the fact that the films of these filmmakers get to be distributed in the US on platforms such as Tubi, Kanopy, and Mubi, demonstrates that there is an increasing interest in Quebec cinema from the US, which challenges common flows of film circulation in North America.

the film industry in Quebec and worldwide; and also they help renew the image of women in francophone Quebec cinema by proposing female protagonists that stand out from the social and cultural stereotypes. Critics laud these filmmakers as exceptional and successful applying neoliberal standards for women's individual achievement predominant in Western postfeminist culture. In Quebec, these praises are often used as examples of the film industry's progressive gender policies. Yet, the filmmakers themselves take a critical stance on the gendered mechanisms of the film industry, and instead negotiate their privileged position as female labourers in a gender-disparaging industry, proposing approaches to filmmaking that emphasize oblique ways of looking at and living in gendered spaces.

By assessing the tensions in their films' diegetic engagement with issues of fluid and nomadic feminine identities, I examine how these filmmakers critique hegemonic constructions of citizenship and femininity in francophone Quebec. Through narrative, mise-en-scène, and point of view, their films articulate gender at the local/global interface and move away from tropes of girlhood that has often characterized of Quebec's national cinema. In many earlier films, the trope of girlhood's discomfort and anguish has explored the gendered perspective within the melancholic unachieved project of national self-determination.²³ In contrast, the contemporary generation of women's cinema in Quebec explores girlhood within the legacies of feminist cultures in Quebec and in the Global North shaped both by historical national contexts and by global girl culture.²⁴ In this respect, depictions of girls in contemporary Quebec's women's cinema are in conversation with larger global trends that explore girlhood as a position to disrupt normative femininity because of its state of transformation and excess (Handyside and Taylor Jones, 2016).²⁵ The films that I will analyse present characters that deviate from neoliberal

²³ Several scholars have explored melancholy as a defining characteristic of Quebec cinema derived from a tragic view of national history and a sense of failure in achieving "mature" national identity especially after the two referenda (Weinmann 1997; Poirier 2004; Dyer 2018; Czach and Loiselle 2020).

²⁴ In Quebec women's cinema, the figure of the girl is quite recurrent. For example, in her very first short fiction film, *Moi, un jour* (1967), Mireille Danserau captures the monotony and the feeling of inadequacy of a 14-year old that through an interior monologue criticizes the bourgeois institution of the family. In *Sonatine* (1984), Micheline Lancotot explores the alienation of the modern subject through the wandering of two young girls on Montreal's public transports. More recent iterations of girlhood in Quebec cinema of the 21st century explicitly challenge *pure laine* versions of Quebec national identity and rebuts dominant narratives of the nation. In this respect, particularly relevant are *Rustic Oracle* (Sonia Boileau Bonspille 2020) and *Beans* (Deer 2020) that explicitly address settler colonial power relations in the province from the perspective of Indigenous young girls. Both set in the 1990s, the two films address two issues largely overlooked in films produced within the province: the first one tackles the violence against Indigenous women, and the second recounts the Oka crisis.

²⁵ Drawing on Driscoll (2002), Handyside and Taylor Jones have identified "cinematic girlhood" as a "set of iconographies and gestures that crosses a variety of borders" defined by "an audio-visual vocabulary and narrative

and glamorous representations of girlhood, challenge binary gendered norms, and disrupt progressive linear narratives of growth into womanhood.

Chloe Robichaud's Introvert Authorship

“J’ai eu droit à beaucoup d’attention, et ç’a été un peu étourdissant. C’est comme si on m’avait catapultée dans quelque chose. Et puis, il y avait Xavier Dolan à l’avant-plan. [...] La personnalité d’un réalisateur devenait alors un peu un facteur de marketing. Au début, ça m’a intimidée. Aujourd’hui, à 30 ans, je suis beaucoup plus à l’aise sur ce plan. J’ai compris qui je suis et je ne suis pas gênée de ce que j’ai à raconter. Je ne me force pas à être plus que ce que je suis, ni de correspondre à une image glam ou plus excentrique. Je n’essaie pas d’être autre chose que moi-même.” Chloé Robichaud (in Lussier 2018)²⁶

Chloé Robichaud (b. 1988) in the above interview discusses her experience as a young filmmaker at Cannes and how she balanced her introverted personality with her sudden, and early international exposure.²⁷ Robichaud emerged as an international *auteur* when she was 25 years old. *Chef de Meute* (*Herd Leader*) played at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival, and competed for the Palm d’Or in the shorts films category. A year later, her first feature film, *Sarah préfère la course* (2013) was selected for the program “Un Certain Regard.”²⁸ In the interview, Robichaud distanced herself from Xavier Dolan—known as the *enfant terrible* of Quebec cinema, who refused the Queer Palm at Cannes in 2012 for his film *Laurence Anyways*—and affirmed the specificity of her own cinema. Many film critics have contrasted Robichaud’s introversion and

traits [...] such as “close attention to the bodily and the sensual, and to heightened, disrupted emotions; [...] privileging sound and decentering the visual” (2016, 7).

²⁶ “I received a lot of attention and it was a bit dazzling, as if they threw me into something [too big]. And then, Xavier Dolan was in the foreground [...] The personality of the filmmaker started to become an aspect of marketing. At the beginning, I was intimidated. Now that I am 30 years old, I feel more confident. I understood who I am and I am not ashamed of what I have to tell. I don’t force myself to be what I am not, nor to fit a glamorous or eccentric image. I don’t try to be something else other than myself.” (Author’s translation)

²⁷ Theoretically I draw on an understanding of authorship in terms of “material strategies of social agency” (Corrigan 1990, 47). In other words, the “author” does not refer to an individual artist whose subjectivity is to be traced in the film text; it is instead the product of reception discourses and cinema’s broader industrial structures. Textual and extra-textual discourses (including any director’s own strategic definition and control of their authorship) contribute to shape the function of the author. Elsaesser writes: “the author in the global context is both a construct and a personality, a locus of agency (control) as well as a focal point of projection (access)” (2016, 23). In this respect, “the author is understood as a discursive entity, another text to be read, both constructed by, and the constructor of, his/her public persona.” (Paszkievicz 2018, 18). Hence, new approaches to film authorship overcome both a *politique des auteurs* understanding of the author as the exceptional, all-conscious individual that would impose *his* vision on films outside of industrial and commercial constraints, as well as poststructuralist declaration of the *death of the author* that rely only on the text to analyse the construction of meaning.

²⁸ Here and throughout this chapter, I will use the French masculine *auteur* because the directors analyzed do not tend to use the feminine “*auteure*”. The feminization of French language and the use of inclusive language is quite recent and not normalized yet in mainstream communications.

minimalist aesthetic to Dolan's eccentric personality and flamboyant cinema. Yet, they both have established themselves as the spokespeople of their generation, and their divergent cinematic styles have been taken as exemplary of Quebec's cinema appeal to global audiences. The parallels between the two filmmakers are easy to draw: both are young and queer, their films exhibited at major international film festivals, and their films articulate locally situated narratives within cosmopolitan art-cinema conventions, critically distancing themselves from Quebec's national culture. Moreover, both filmmakers have foregrounded queer narratives while denying any explicit political engagement or identifying their cinema as queer.²⁹ However, even if Robichaud prefers to define her portrayal of lesbian experience within the universalist discourse of art-cinema instead of taking an activist stance, it is possible to track an evolution in Robichaud's own position vis-à-vis gender and sexuality. Her first feature, *Sarah préfère la course*, which established her reputation, did not make the protagonist's coming out explicit. In her web-series *Féminin/Féminin* (2014–18), Robichaud progressively addressed lesbianism more explicitly. Her second feature *Pays* (*Boundaries*, 2016), articulates women's embodied worldviews within masculine environments.³⁰ In this section, I argue that Robichaud strategically reclaims for herself the posture of the *auteur*, but recognizes her gendered position in the film industry, and expresses in her work, across different media, complex feminine characters defined outside an heteronormative economy of gaze.³¹

Robichaud subverts and plays with the conventions of art cinema challenging abstract and universalizing constructions of femininity in auteurist cinematic traditions. She creates an alternative cinematic space in which feminine subjectivities are not fixed, but are continuously defined and redefined through an exploration of desire, of the intimate, and of the boundaries

²⁹ Scholar F. Massimi has analyzed Dolan's work as the expression of a post-gay sensibility, defined as a "disengagement with identity politics practices that position activism at the center of the gay experience" (2018, 137). This framework is also useful to study and interpret Robichaud's work as she does not completely disengage with "lesbian" as a self-identifying term, but she also detaches her cinema from a narrow focus on gender and sexuality and from an activist notion of queer representation.

³⁰ This more direct address of gendered issues will likely be at the center of Robichaud's third feature, planned to come out in Fall 2023. Titled *Les jours heureux* (*Happy Days*), the film will focus on the character of a young conductor of orchestra played by Sophie Desmarais. As also discussed by Longfellow, the web series *Féminin/Féminin* is an example of a new media practice within contemporary configurations of women's cinema that provides "a crucial site for the dissemination and the production of provocative and explicitly feminist and LGBTQ content for a new generation" (2019). I have extensively studied this web series, focusing on its unique circulation history (from alternative streaming to broadcast streaming platforms).

³¹ Heteronormativity is a concept first coined by Warner in *Fear of a Queer World* (1993) to define the worldview that considers only monogamous relationships between men and women as normal. According to Warner, this fundamental belief consequently shapes every aspect of social life.

between the personal and the political. Thus, I contend that Robichaud's own positioning as an *auteur* is a controlled strategy with a twofold function: first, it allows her to legitimize her thematic and stylistic choices without explicitly subscribing to a political feminist mandate. Second, by framing her filmmaking approach within an art-cinema tradition, she brands her work for international distribution within the festival and art-house circuits, making local settings and French-Quebec accented narratives attractive to a global (although, mostly francophone) high-brow audience.

In this respect, the web series *Féminin/Féminin* was a crucial pivot point for the young filmmaker's career. Originally produced by and created within the lesbian community of Montreal, it soon got attention in the transnational queer community. The web series follows a group of lesbian friends in Montreal and combines a filmic aesthetic with the serial narrative form of television.³² The first season draws on a modernist cinematic tradition through the use of irony, mockumentary sequences, culture jams, extra-diegetic absurd inserts, and self-inscription.³³ For example, the show alternates between fictionalized segments and staged interviews with Robichaud interviewing herself. In the first episode, the protagonists, while hanging out in a bar, randomly run into Robichaud and ask her to make a film about Montreal lesbians. Through these distancing devices, Robichaud claims a privileged position for herself within the text, not only as the *auteur*, but also a member of Montreal's lesbian community, thus explicitly taking a stance on queer representations in media.³⁴ Even when choosing a "minor" filmmaking practice,³⁵ such as the web series, Robichaud has strategically mobilized her role as "*une fille de cinéma*" ("a film girl") to promote the web series, delving into her working methods—such as shooting with a full film crew and professional cinematic cameras (Robichaud 2019).

³² The discussion of the web series in this section partially draws on the chapter "*Féminin/ Féminin*: Lesbian Storytelling from Web to Television" (wrote in 2019; forthcoming), in which I examined the circulation of *Féminin/ Féminin* across alternative circuits of distribution, streaming platforms of traditional broadcast television, and VOD services.

³³ Longfellow (2019) has noted that the title of the series itself could be interpreted as a *détournement* of Godard's *Masculin/Feminin* (1968). According to Julia Obermayr (2019, 261), the title of the series makes instead reference to the erotic lesbian drama *Féminin Féminin* (Henri Calef and Joao Correa, 1972, France/Belgium).

³⁴ It must be noted that the non-linear narrative, mostly structured around sketches, and the experimental artifices of the first season leave space to a more conventional linear and progressive form of storytelling in the second season, where various narrative threads and character developments intertwine in each episode and find a solution at the end.

³⁵ Patricia White defines lesbian minor cinema as "lesbian works that deploy a certain 'poverty'" within the major language of fictional feature films – "in terms of means of production or aesthetic approach," which deflects "audience demand for familiar stories, happy endings, repeatable pleasures, identity assurance" (2008, 410–11).

As a female director on a global stage, Robichaud deconstructs essentialist assumptions about women filmmaking, but acknowledges her embodied perspective in deliberately choosing to represent feminine characters. On the one hand, she expressed irritation with critics that focused on her gender and attempted to limit her work to the realm of “feminine” and “othered.” On the other hand, she asserts a gendered stance as a category of interpretation for her cinema. She says: “Je fais un cinéma féminin car j’essaie de proposer des personnages féminins complexes et, je l’espère, réalistes,” justifying her choice to express her “reality as a woman” (“ma réalité de femme”) through female-centered narratives that address women as spectators (Gobert and Lanlo 2018, 46–47).³⁶ While Robichaud does not explicitly conceive of her cinema as political or feminist, she nonetheless showcases women’s identities and desiring subjectivities through her *mise-en-scène* and cinematography. Describing her approach to filmmaking, she defines her cinema as “un cinéma très assumé, sans compromis, axé sur les personnages féminins car on en a peu. Hyperréaliste avec des images qui servent un propos. Les images sont au service des personnages et non d’un cinéma tape-à-l’œil.”³⁷ Rather than developing a linear plot and dominant cinematic constructions of femininity, she foregrounds the interior world of the female characters with her minimalist aesthetic, Brechtian estranging devices, and irony. Thus, her work rejects a reception framework that essentializes women’s cinema as a cinema that reflects women’s sensibility and ignores the aesthetics and strategies of address women filmmakers deploy to opposition dominant cinematic languages.

While Robichaud does not identify her films are political, Robichaud has been vocal about the scarcity of women working behind the camera and the need for structural changes in the Quebec film industry. For instance, she finds the quota system—which sets minimums on the number of films produced and directed by women that receive funding from major Quebec and Canadian agencies—as a necessary, albeit not final, step towards gender equality in the film industry. She suggests that the quota system is only a provisory solution and might be essentializing:

Ce qui importe davantage à mes yeux, plus que le sexe de la personne qui est derrière la caméra, c’est de qui parle l’histoire qu’on raconte, et compte-t-elle suffisamment de

³⁶ “I make women’s cinema in the sense that I try to propose complex and, I hope, realistic women characters.” (Author’s translation).

³⁷ “A fully self-assumed cinema, without compromise, centered on female characters because there aren’t otherwise many. [A cinema that is] Hyperrealist, with images that make a statement. [A cinema where] the images are at the service of characters, and to a flashy [cinema]” (Author’s translation).

personnages de femmes complexes et nuancées. La parité à l'écran m'importe davantage, mais il faut donner les mêmes opportunités derrière aussi. (quoted in Lussier 2018)³⁸

Robichaud counters a simplistic approach to gender-equality that looks only at numbers without taking into account further cultural changes needed in the film industry. By dissociating the filmmaker's gender from aesthetic and thematic choices on screen, she offers another point of entry to interpret her intervention into the discourse around women's cinema. Her attention to the intimate, to details, to the interiority of women's characters, as well as her aesthetic strategies to mark difference, must not be simply attributed to her gender, but rather to her embodied position and conscious intention to reinvent cinematic language that deconstructs the static iconography of femininity and values instead non-normative embodiments of femininities.

Robichaud depicts trajectories of female characters that counter progressive, linear narratives of womanhood, and by extension the nationalistic narrative of Quebec. This is especially evident in *Sarah préfère la course*. I argue that the film, through a troubled coming-of-age story and the foregrounding of the lesbian body, proposes a critique both of heteronormative institutions of the nation and of neoliberal standards of successful femininity, thus articulating a tension between local and global issues of gender and sexuality. I draw on Jack Halberstam's concept of *queer failure*, which explores "failure" as a form of queer critique and resistance to "specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation" which are considered as standards of success within the parameters of a "heteronormative, capitalist society" (2011, 2). In that context, explains Halberstam, "*lesbian* is irrevocably tied to failure" because the queer body refuses the logic of "achievement, fulfillment, and success(ion)" (2011, 94; emphasis in the text).

Sarah préfère la course (*Sarah Prefers to Run*) is a film driven by the intimate world of its protagonist, Sarah (Sophie Desmarais), a young woman from Quebec City's suburbs, for whom running is her only passion, interest, and motivation. Her athletic skills earn her a scholarship from McGill University, which prompts her to move to Montreal. Because Sarah's mother cannot financially support her, Sarah accepts the scholarship only when her friend Antoine (Jean-Sebastien Courchesne) offers to move together as roommates and to help her

³⁸ "What is more important, according to me, is less the sex of the director than who is the story on screen talking about and if it includes enough complex and subtle feminine characters. I care more about equality on the screen, but it is necessary to give the same opportunity [to anyone] behind the camera" (Author's translation).

financially. While Antoine seems to be interested in Sarah, she does not show any sign of attraction for him. Early on, the film's sober *mise-en-scène* suggests Sarah's queerness. Moreover, she does not adopt normative standards of female beauty, such as wearing make-up. Instead, she either wears athletic clothes or plain shirts, and she does not hesitate to voraciously eat poutine while Antoine watches. To qualify for government subsidies for married university students, Antoine suggests that they could marry. After some hesitancy, Sarah accepts, but she refuses to act like a couple, and insists on continuing to live as housemates. Meanwhile, Sarah immerses herself in training at McGill and gets to know her girl teammates better.

The spaces of the gym, the track, and the locker room showers are inhabited homosocial enclaves for Sarah. There, she timidly explores her homoerotic desire through furtive glances, and develops an attraction to one of her teammates, Zoey (Geneviève Bouvin-Roussy). Nothing is explicit about Sarah's and Zoey's relationship: one day, they spend the afternoon together in Zoey's bedroom without really talking nor doing anything, just laying down on the bed until Zoey falls asleep (Fig. 3). By sharing this intimate moment of unproductivity, the two young women together inhabit a queer temporality, suspending the frenetic expectations of successful womanhood. This state of intimate abstraction and deferral from the constraints of productivity reaches its climax during a student party, where Zoey performs karaoke singing "Un jour, il viendra mon amour," a poignant love song from the early 1970s. Contrapuntally to the mundane settings and lighting of the rest of the film, this scene is marked by excess: a dim lilac light frames Zoey's face in close-up when she sings; shot/reverse shots alternate close-ups of Sarah looking at Zoey singing whose voice, in Sarah's imagination, is transfigured in the limpid and high pitched voice of the French-Canadian singer Diane Dufresne. Even though Sarah and Zoey are not directly looking at each other reciprocally, the sound of the song performed by Zoey and heard by Sarah connects them in a moment of shared sublimation of their attraction, which ends when Sarah starts feeling a huge pain at her heart. Thus, Sarah undergoes an episode of "disorientation," described by Sarah Ahmed as "a violent feeling" that describes the experience of "becoming queer" in which sexual "deviation" from heteronormativity both provokes and entails a larger social and affective reshuffling (2006, 160–62). Indeed, after this episode, Sarah's life is disturbed when, after feeling sick at a student party, she learns she has a heart condition that might prevent her from pursuing an athletic career. However, in the last scene of the film, before a track meet, Sarah takes off the equipment that measures her heart health and decides

that she will keep running. After she quietly yet confidently touches Zoey's hand in the locker room, Sarah's final sprint constitutes a liberatory vital act, symbolizing her refusal to be contained within established paths of normative femininity.



Figure 3 *Sarah préfère la course*. Screenshot.

The film does not proceed according to a progressive narrative, but rather through a juxtaposition of episodes, dominated by silences or short and slow dialogues that convey the protagonist's experience of the world as an introvert. By refusing the conventions of the coming-of-age plot and privileging a rather shy articulation of lesbian sexual desire, the film elaborates a representation of feminine subjectivity that, through failing at heteronormativity, ultimately disrupts and dismantles linear narratives of identity formation at the level of the personal and the intimate. To demonstrate this point, I want to briefly discuss the scene in which Sarah and Antoine have sex for the first and only time. At night, in their small and modest apartment, full of dull and worn-out furniture, Sarah and Antoine finally seem to share a moment of intimacy and begin kissing. By the time Sarah finds herself half undressed on the floor of the kitchen, while Antoine looks for a condom, she expresses no passion or interest in continuing. When Antoine is finally on top of Sarah, the camera takes her point of view, focused on the top edges of some furniture with a shaky yet regular oscillating camera movement. It conveys Sarah's total detachment and boredom in the whole affair. While the moment is consensual and not violent, Antoine does not listen or understand Sarah's introversion. The day after, Sarah tells Antoine that there would be no repeat of the night before. Subsequently, Antoine asks for divorce even though, drunk, he confesses his love for Sarah. Sarah's rejection of the institution of heterosexual marriage, along with her implicit disinterest in normative ideals of femininity, opens up a space of alterity that repudiates patriarchal models of growth and identity formation. In this respect, by inscribing the female lesbian body at the center of the film, Robichaud addresses issues of

gendered representations that counter Quebec cinema's dominant discourse that has defined men's experiences as neutral, universal, and authentic representation of a Quebecois subject.

Through a female character that "fails" at proper womanhood, opposes the political and auteurist tradition in Quebec national cinema preoccupied with masculinist and hegemonic constructions of the nation (Nadeau 1999). In *Sarah préfère la course*, the question of Quebec nationalism is only briefly, and almost incidentally acknowledged, and soon dismissed with irony. When Sarah, as a new member of the McGill athletic team, is interviewed by an anglophone McGill student for the university newspaper, she seems disoriented and chuckles at the sudden question: « Tu te considères souverainiste ? » (Are you a Quebec nationalist ?). The interviewer insists asking instead: "Are you proud to be a Canadian athlete?" to which Sarah replies: "I am only proud when I beat my record and I win a match." Sarah's indifference to questions about provincial versus federal nationalism are not just a young generation's simple dismissal of political issues, but rather as a distancing from narrow understanding of the political discourse of nationhood. While there is not an overt critique of Quebec and Canadian nationalisms, Sarah's trajectory of failure within the heteronormative institution of marriage displaces overt political preoccupations of nation building onto the realm of the personal through a veiled critique of those very social and economic structures that constitute the basis of the nation.

These brief allusions to the specifically local context of Quebec along with the linguistic specificity of the city of Montreal, and especially anglophone universities, in which French and English continuously mingle, are in dialectic tension with a lesbian coming-of age narrative that makes the film highly "exportable" and attractive to the cosmopolitan audiences of the international film festival circuit. In the film, the force, and the structures of the national are destabilized through a feminine subjectivity that refuses to conform to established gender and sexual roles in a neoliberal culture that emphasizes empowerment and success. In this respect, Robichaud makes an intervention within the cinematic imaginary through oppositional aesthetic and narrative choices, and illustrates how francophone women's cinema in Quebec can reach transnational circuits of film exhibition and distribution.

Sophie Deraspe's Sophisticated Cinema between Social Drama and Myth

In Fall 2019, Nohema Ricci's face in red and white was everywhere in Montreal: posters on

walls, postcards in coffeeshops and cinemas, and shared on social media. Advertising the film *Antigone*, the image shows the lead actress's face in white on a red background with the title in stark black letters. The aesthetics and the distribution method resembled guerilla street art, like stencilled pictures and political graffiti. In particular, the saturated red of the posters resembled the red cloth squares students pinned to their coats and backpacks during the *Printemps d'Erable* (Maple Spring), the 2012 student strike against government proposals to raise the tuition of post-secondary schools.³⁹ The strike was a major political event in Quebec's recent history, vividly engraved in the collective memory of the province. Given the police's violent response to the protests, the *Printemps d'Erable* also represented a moment of awakening for white Quebecers that experienced police brutality firsthand. Thus, the strike not only raised awareness about austerity measures and the privatization of higher education, but also instigated a larger reflection on the predicament of the neoliberal state and the necessity of establishing solidarity across social movements.⁴⁰ The postcards and posters for *Antigone*, therefore, momentarily could be mistaken for political street art, and evoked recent memories in many Montrealers. The posters' dissemination around Montreal mirrors some of the thematic concerns within the film about the affective role of grassroots methods of creating a counter public sphere against hegemonic discourses of Canadian citizenship. In this respect, the poster was not only a simple advertisement, but an expansion of the film's diegesis, creating a play between fiction and truth, socio-historical reality and myth. These boundaries are at the core of Sophie Deraspe's filmography.

Documentary and fiction filmmaker Sophie Deraspe (1973) grew up in Rivière du Loup, a small city on the south shore of St. Lawrence River in Northern Quebec. After *Rechercher Victor Pellerin* (2006), the press declared her an *auteur* with her second feature fiction film, *Les Signes Vitaux* (2010). These works helped comprise the *renouveau du cinéma québécois* (Quebec cinema new wave), a label used by film critics to describe the renewed aesthetic sensibility since 2005 in filmmakers like Denis Côté, Stéphane Lafleur, and Maxime Giroux (Sirois Trahan 2010).

³⁹ Art historian Olivier Asselin (2012) has examined the small red square as a powerful affective symbol of the strike that situates le *Printemps d'Erable* within a genealogy of social(ist) struggles.

⁴⁰ According to feminist political philosopher Diane Lamoureux, "Le mouvement de grève étudiante [...] est passé d'un mouvement étudiant à une lutte sociale, révélant des fractures politiques importantes dans la société québécoise." In particular, according to Lamoureux, in defending a vision of education as a public service against the neoliberal view of education as a private good, the student strike defended collective action and participatory democracy. Moreover, according to Lamoureux, the strike was in conversation with the anti-globalization movement, such as Indignados and #Occupy (2012, paragraph 1 and 7).

This cohort's filmography is characterized by a formal study (*plans-sequences*, geometrical framing, little dialogue, and a *mise-en scène* that privileges suburban non identifiable spaces) to address intimate themes, and a combination of naturalism with oneiric visions (Bailey 2010). Within these films, *Les Signes Vitaux* is a respectful portrait of the work done in a palliative care center through the eyes of the disabled protagonist Simone (Marie Hélène Bellavance). It offers a reflection on death, relationships, and care work, combining professional and non-professional actors, fiction and documentary sequences. In the film, the images of bodies weakened by the passage of time, disease, and death are not morbid or objectified, but rather show an ethical search for kinds of relationality beyond the strictly normative bonds of kinship. Deraspe's earlier feature, *Rechercher Victor Pellerin* (2006), would seem to be very different in tone and style. It is a mockumentary about the disappearance of a fictional iconoclastic painter Victor Pellerin that plays with the codes of *cinéma vérité*. Through interviews with Victor's friends and colleagues in the Canadian contemporary art scene, the investigative documentary style offers an ironic critique on the mechanisms of the art world. Yet, both films experiment with fictional narratives using a documentary style and established Deraspe's reputation as a talented original filmmaker.⁴¹

Deraspes asserts her agency through her control of her auteurist image. Deraspes speaks openly about her artistic process, from her methods of film research and writing, to intellectual analysis of her work and her cultural references. At the same time, Deraspes also presents herself as a technically savvy, stressing her knowledge as a film editor and director of photography (Gobert and Lanlo 2017, 78; Banzhaf 2019). Through these efforts, Deraspes defies abstract notions of female authorship and emphasizes the practical and physical dimension of working in the film industry. Thus, Deraspes frames her filmmaking practice as artisanal, preferring independent cinematic modes of production characterized by small budgets and flexible structures that allow for creative freedom, her personal involvement in different stages, and impromptu experimentation. This particular method of working is ultimately what, for Deraspes, constitutes the specificity of women's cinema that she defines as a "small, specialized cinema, independent, and *d'auteur*," citing Andrea Arnold and Debra Granik as models (Gobert and

⁴¹ Melissa Theriault finds that "the continuous hybridisation between fiction and non-fiction constitutes a rhetorical strategy on behalf of Quebec filmmakers to express their political and social positions" (2014, 133). This "brouillage" is a consequence of a *cinéma direct* approach to filmmaking that not only revolutionized documentary practice with the NFB, but also highly shaped fiction filmmaking in Quebec. In this respect, Deraspe draws on the cinematic convention in Quebec cinema of blurring the lines between documentary and fiction. Yet, I also interpret Deraspe's documentary approaches to fiction filmmaking as a way of fostering a more ethical practice based on human interrelation, as demonstrated in the quote at the beginning of this section.

Lanlo 2017, 81–84). Her definition of women’s cinema avoids explicit political connotations, but allows Deraspe to justify the marginality and oblique position of her cinema within hegemonic modes of representation and filmmaking. Deraspe’s cinema is concerned with issues of mediation that shape our understanding of reality and is interested in exploring the boundaries between reality and fiction. Thematically, this preoccupation is carried over through female characters’ narrative quests for truth as they try to decipher the construction of their existences, attempt to deconstruct linear narratives of identity formation, and redefine interpersonal connections through an ethics of care and outside rigid models of social relations.

Notwithstanding this condition of marginality, Deraspe also recognizes her privileged position as a successful female filmmaker in Quebec with several feature films. From this position of authority, Deraspe can advocate for women filmmakers in the Quebec film industry. While she overtly acknowledges the structural difficulties women might have in accessing budgets to make their own film, she also invites women to be more assertive and confident in their projects to work in the milieu of filmmaking. Deraspe believes that the milieu of independent cinema, with the creative freedom it allows, constitutes a space where women filmmakers can advance her projects even with small budgets, and eventually will allow them to progressively access to major funding (Gobert and Lanlo 2017). In this respect, Deraspe seem to endorse a postfeminist approach that tends to disregard the specificity of gender as constituting of women’s experience, and emphasizes, instead, individual choice and personal responsibility as determining women’s success (Tasker and Negra 2007; McRobbie 2008). Through this posture, Deraspe attempts to situate herself and her work outside an essentializing critical reception discourse that would limit her to only a “woman.” Thus, this postfeminist stance can be interpreted more as a strategy of personal self-affirmation, than a straightforward assimilation within the difficult mechanisms of film industry.

Deraspe’s preference for local, artisanal methods of filmmaking, rooted in the production structures of Quebec film industry, is, perhaps, at odds with her career trajectory that became increasingly global. While all of her films circulated in international film festivals, her last two films reached an especially broad audience. *The Amina Profile* premiered at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival in the World Cinema Documentary Competition, and *Antigone* (2019) won the Best Canadian Feature Film award at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2019 and was consequently selected as Canada’s choice for the Oscars nomination in 2020. Both films address

questions of travelling, international relations, constructions and definitions of nation and citizenship within the complicated networks of local and global institutions. They thematize the Quebec-rooted transnational narratives that appeal to the cosmopolitan taste of the above-mentioned renowned international film festivals' audiences. These films explore cinematic worlds that construct alternative models of affections and sociality, although the festivals' reception has foregrounded the films' narratives of female subjectivity within a Western-centric humanitarian discourse.

Antigone is a particularly interesting case. The film adapts Sophocles' Greek tragedy—drawing from Bertolt Brecht's and Jean Anouilh's retellings—to present day multicultural Montreal. The female-centered narrative deals with questions of diasporic identities that challenge the rigid judicial system and immigration policies of the Canadian state. While rooted in the local context of Quebec, through cultural references to francophone Québécois literature (such as a quotation of the poem “Ah! Ce n'est pas la peine” by De Saint-Denys Garneau), a multilingualism that mixes Québécois and Kabyle, and an extra-textual reference to Montreal news, it does not address Quebec-specific immigration policies. Transcending any preoccupation with Quebec nationalist history and politics, the film's narrative is instead situated within the framework of the supra-national institution of Canada. Thus, whereas Deraspe does not renounce a francophone cultural specificity, she contributes to an opening of the meaning of ‘the national’ to plurality by foregrounding immigrant experience as constitutive of Canadian social reality, thus displacing Quebec cinema's concern with a narrow definition of national identity.

The context of circulation and exhibition further complicates the relations between local/global, national/transnational that the film poses. In this regard, the opening of *Antigone* at the TIFF is relevant. TIFF has established itself as one of the most important film festivals in North America through its politically progressive program, and whose “national spotlight program [...] needs to reflect the cinematic output of the entire nation” (Czach 2004, 84). Thus, *Antigone*, a family drama commenting on the North American refugee and immigrant experience, contributes to the festival's interest in showing Canada as a progressive country. Within the context of TIFF, while *Antigone* offers a critique to normative constructions of femininity and to the repressive institutions of the state, it appeals to Western audiences' gaze on immigration narratives.

This is mostly evident in the background story that is at the origin of the protagonist's

precarious status in Canada: Antigone and her family—her grandmother, her sister Ismene, and her two brothers Eteocles and Polynice — arrived as refugees in the early 2000s and their status in Canada remains precarious. While in the press kit Deraspe refers to Antigone’s family as Algerian immigrants, their country of origin is never mentioned in the film. Only the grandmother’s stubborn refusal to speak French and only communicate in Kabyle indicates a country of origin.⁴² By denying the historical specificity of the events that are the cause of Antigone’s family refugee status, the film contributes to a Western-centric imaginary conflates the conflicts in the Global South and the consequent refugee experiences.

Antigone was inspired by the shooting of innocent 18-year-old Honduran immigrant Fredy Villanueva by a police officer in the poor neighbourhood of Montreal Nord in 2008.⁴³ Villanueva’s death provoked rioting against police brutality. Patricia Villanueva, Fredy’s sister, actively and vocally sought justice for her brother. By drawing on this local story about police violence, and its consequences for people with precarious status in Canada, Deraspe anchors Antigone’s myth within a specific geopolitical and social reality and critiques the rigid mechanisms that regulate immigrants’ precarious conditions in the West. Deraspe’s film depicts youth protests, locally and globally, that challenge rigid definitions of citizenship, and redefine grassroots participation to democracy. Yet, in *Antigone*, Deraspe does not conflate distinct social movements (such as the *Printemps d’Erable* and Quebec protests police brutality); but creates a space of solidarity to reflect on the acknowledgement that systemic racism is deeply intertwined with the neoliberal nation-state.

Deraspes draws on two main, literary adaptations of Antigone’s story. First, obviously, Sophocles’ *Antigone*, which depicted Antigone with heroic stature and firmness. Her second

⁴² The pamphlet prepared by the distribution company Maison 3:4 extra-textually provides somewhat further historical and geo-political contextualization on Antigone’s family background in the film. Kabylia is a region in North Algeria where the Berber population, since Algerian independency, has struggled to maintain cultural and linguistic rights. The pamphlet does not mention the “Black Spring” of 2001, a series of social protests and riots against the national Arab government’s continuous socio-economic and political marginalization of the Berber population.

⁴³ On a summer night in 2008, a police patrol finds a group of young people playing in a parking next to the park Henri Bourassa in Montreal Nord, thus violating a municipal by-law in Montreal Nord. When one of the young people, Dany Villanueva, is arrested by the police, a riot starts and the police starts shooting thus killing Freddy Villanueva, Dany’s brother, and blessing other people. The episode sprung further social protest against police brutality. The policeman who killed Freddy was initially absolved, but, only in 2013, a new inquiry concluded that the police patrol and group of young people in the park had shared responsibility in the tragic death of Freddy Villanueva. Meanwhile, in 2010, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada ordered the expulsion of Denny Villanueva, who didn’t have citizenship, to Honduras. Only the final decision of the Board in 2016 stated that Denis Villanueva could remain in Canada.

literary source is Jean Anouilh's 1944 adaptation that, in later stage productions, has represented a figure of identification for the French students protesters in May 1968 for her rebellious character that connotes Antigone as a young resistant to any compromise. Adapting the myth of Antigone, established in the Western philosophical tradition as a feminist figure *ante-litteram*, Deraspe's film articulates a critique not only of what constitutes the sphere of the political, but also of national bureaucracy that conceives citizenship only within formal norms. According to feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray, Antigone "is always worth reflecting upon as a historical figure and as an identity and identification for many girls and women living today" (Irigaray 1985, 70), because she challenges both the patriarchal political order and her expected subordination. Queer philosopher Judith Butler has also thoroughly analyzed Antigone as a "counterfigure" (2000, 1) that offers a radical critique of the state's authority because she troubles any heteronormative understanding of kinship. "Antigone represents not kinship in its ideal form but its deformation and displacement, one that puts the reigning regimes of representation into crisis and raises the question of [...] what sustaining web of relations makes our lives possible" (Butler 2000, 24). By defending an ethical order founded on interpersonal relationships against the official laws of the state, Antigone becomes the personification of marginalized individuals that are in various degrees excluded or discriminated by dominant social, cultural, and political norms. Deraspe draws on Antigone's emblematic force and integrity to tell the story of a young woman with no official citizen status in Canada that defies rigid mechanisms of immigration policy, and a patriarchal power that is dispersed throughout various institutions of the nation (police, tribunal, judges, politicians) that are deaf to her desperate claim for justice within an alternative ethical system of value based on kinship.

In the Greek tragedy, Antigone's act of defiance is the burial of her brother Polynices (killed by his brother Eteocles) against the order of Creon, who had commanded that Polynices' corpse to be left on the battlefield as act of punishment for bringing war to Thebes. In the film, instead, Eteocles is killed by the police in the park where he is playing with some friends and his brother Polynices. The latter is prisoned because accused of assaulting the officer who shot his brother. Antigone's act of defiance in the film is the rescue of her brother Polynices by helping him evade prison. Antigone, with the complicity of her sister Ismene and her grandmother Méni, decides to take Polynices's place in prison and in order to do so, she goes through a drag that erases the most evident signs of her femininity, notably cutting her long hair (Fig. 4). This highly theatrical

device of cross-gendering literally embodies Antigone's act of transgression of both gender expectation and more specifically of her position as a Canadian resident without official status. Because of her actions, she is repeatedly threatened with losing her Canadian residency and of deportation for herself and her whole family. Throughout the film, Antigone stands out as a strong and determined character that vocally defends the reason why she chose to take her brother's place and advocates for a broad sense of justice that cannot be contained by the official laws of the state.



Figure 4 *Antigone*. Screenshot.

In her challenge to the institutions of the state, Antigone is supported by her high school friend Hémon, a Quebecois, with whom she develops a romantic relationship that culminates near the end of the film when they have sex. However, ultimately, Antigone, by refusing to do what is necessary to stay in Canada, also refuses to do what is necessary to stay with Hémon and thus to perpetuate the ideal of heterosexuality and citizenship. At the end of the film, Antigone, her grandmother, and Polynices are escorted by the police at the airport to be deported. While walking, Antigone sees in the opposite direction a newly arrived family of refugees that resembles her own family nucleus as we saw it at the beginning of the film. Antigone exchanges an intense look with the child in a stroller, and recognizes herself when arrived with her own family in Canada. This short-circuits the plot that, instead of moving forward towards a resolution, circles back onto itself. On the one hand, this circularity points at the state of suspension in which immigrants without full citizenship exist, a condition in which they are denied fully humanity until when they meet legal requirements (Agamben 2005). On the other hand, this circular temporality extracts the story from the specific geopolitical context of the refugee crisis and reinserts it within a mythological rank.

In the film, the myth and a realist style continuously intertwine. The *mise-en-scène* sharply

distinguishes the spaces of social relations constituted at the level of kinship where Antigone shares intimate moments of conviviality with her family, and the cold spaces (prison, tribunal, airport) where Antigone's body is confined by the state. The cinematography closely follows the characters with fluid hand-held camera movements that often lingers in close-up on their faces, which isolates them as archetypal figures.

The most telling way the film signals the blurring of boundaries between myth and reality is its particular imagining of the chorus. In Sophocles' tragedy, the chorus comments on the dramatic events and represents the public's reactions and perspectives. In Deraspe's retelling, the chorus is rendered through three mixed-media montages that punctuate the film. The first one, occurring right after the death of Eteocles, pays homage to Eteocles and expresses the dissonant views on police brutality. A hip hop song, mixed with the sound of a crowd protesting, plays over a fast montage of fictional found footage-style videos of the shooting, commemorative images of Eteocles and his family, videos of political protests and street life, and a triptych that resembles cellphone videos. Social media-like comments are superimposed over the images, on the bottom left on the screen, which convey public support and opinions. The chorus is again evoked when Antigone's lawyer shows on his phone the polarized debate Antigone's gesture provoked both within traditional media outlets (television and newspapers) and on social media. This montage shows remixed, animated manipulations of Antigone's racialized image, which insinuate her possible involvement in street gangs and fetishize Muslim women as passive victims. Antigone's grandmother outside Antigone's juvenile detention facility prompts the last sequence representing the chorus. Set to a traditional chant, the montage of videos show how Antigone has become a symbol for a new social movement that uses her image (in the form of stickers, patches, posters, graffiti, t-shirts) to endorse Antigone's revolution of claiming an ethical order based on love, solidarity, and kinship. Together, these three experimental sequences, interpolated within a realist *mise-en-scène*, both emphasize the local dimension of the story (with references to the *Printemps d'érable* and Montreal street protests that are relatable to a Quebec-based audience), and, at the same, frame it within a global (North) perspective on the role social media and grassroots social movements play in redefining narrow understandings of the political and of activism. In this respect, the aesthetic of the chorus presents these local references – student protests and police brutality – as part of a shared global culture of activism that transcends provincial or national borders through Antigone, who becomes a global symbol for

political change, rejecting the limitations of individual female empowerment.

Geneviève Dulude-De Celles: Coming-of-Age Narrative in the Contact Zones

« Je suis pour la parité. Je pense que ça prend un coup de barre comme ça, parce qu'on vit encore dans un monde où nous sommes constamment défavorisées. Et il faut forcer les choses pour qu'elles finissent par devenir naturelles. À travers les rapports de lecture d'*Une colonie*, par exemple, je me suis posé beaucoup de questions sur notre compréhension collective de la dramaturgie, qui demeure encore trop universellement ancrée dans la présence de conflits. » Geneviève Dulude-De Celles (quoted in Dequen 2019)⁴⁴

In 2019, Quebecoise filmmaker Geneviève Dulude-De Celles's *Une colonie*, debuted in the Generation Kplus program of the Berlinale International Film Festival. Of the photos on the festival's website, one caught my attention. In it, the young actress Emilie Bierre, who starred in *Une colonie*, and director Dulude-De Celles hug each other and smile to the camera (Fig. 5). While posed photos like this are quite common, their tenderness and the affection of their embrace struck me, and reminded me of a mother and daughter. One can read this gesture symbolically, as an extension of the filmmaker's authorial agency, as well as an expression of solidarity between two women working in the film industry, suggesting the caring of the director for a young actress launched on the stage of global cinema. I begin my discussion of Geneviève Dulude-De Celles with this photo because it both portrays the filmmaker as a "global woman director" and raises questions of authorial agency and labor as a female filmmaker in the Quebec film industry. Combining the role of director and producer, Dulude-De Celles inscribes her filmmaking practice within the artisanal ethos of the *cinéma d'auteur* movement in Quebec and reclaims for herself a crucial role as a cultural producer. While she does not situate her films within the political project of women's cinema, she does propose novel approaches to filmmaking that phenomenologically explore the world of young adults and gesture toward interrelatedness.

⁴⁴ "I am for gender equality [in the film industry]. I think that it takes some strong bylaws because we still live in a world where we [women filmmakers] are disadvantaged. And we need to force things so that they will eventually become natural. For example, reading the feedbacks on the screenplay of *A Colony*, I questioned our collective understanding of dramaturgy, often still very much based on conflict" (Author's translation).



Figure 5 Emilie Bierre and Geneviève Dulude-De Celles at Berlinale in 2019.

Geneviève Dulude-De Celles (1987) was born in Sorel-Tracy, located on the St. Lawrence River just north of Montreal. She received a Masters in Communication from Université du Québec à Montréal, and worked on various projects, including mentoring young filmmakers through the Wapikoni Mobile organization. Her first full-length film was the documentary *Bienvenue à F.L.*, which premiered at the 2015 Toronto International Film Festival, although it received little attention outside of Quebec. She gained international recognition when her short film *La coupe* (*The Cut*) won the Short Film Jury Award for International Fiction at Sundance Film Festival in 2014. This was cemented in 2019, when her debut fiction film *Une colonie* (*A Colony*) won a Crystal Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival. While her filmography is short, a distinct themes and style can be seen in Dulude-De Celles's work. The films all depict adolescence as a transformative phase, characterized by in-betweenness and self-discovery through encounters with others, and has a signature documentary approach. In this section, I will first situate Dulude-De Celles' position vis-à-vis the major issues of women's filmmaking in Quebec. Then, I will briefly cover Dulude-De Celles's filmography before my more detailed discussion of *Une Colonie*. While her films are not explicitly political and distance themselves from openly feminist representations of female subjectivity, Dulude-De Celles defines herself as a feminist. This gestures toward a form of agency that the filmmaker asserts as a strategy not only of self-promotion, but also of survival within the Quebec film industry.

As an independent filmmaker, she works in modes of cinematic production that allow her to maintain control over her projects and ensure artistic freedom. All her films have been developed with her production company Colonnelles Films, co-founded with Fanny Drew and Sarah Mannering, and funded by Sodec. All employees of Colonnelles Films are women. In an interview, Dulude-De Celles said that this is not “a political nor a feminist gesture, even though I am a feminist” (Coulombe 2019, 7; my translation). Indeed, Colonnelles Films does not produce films made exclusively by women, nor does it put forward any gender-specific label or description in its catalogue. Instead, its mandate is rather “to defend a new generation of film directors” and to produce “quality, humanist, free and innovative author cinema” (Colonnelles Films, n.d.). While the production company does not carry on any specifically feminist mandate, it provides a space for auteurist cinema and particularly for emergent filmmakers.⁴⁵

The quote that opened this section came from an interview between Dulude-De Celle and Micheline Lanctôt titled “Les nouveaux territoires du cinéma Québécois,” published in *24 Images*. Comparing their careers, Dulude-De Celle’s as a successful producer and director, and Micheline Lanctôt’s, as one of the most outspoken female filmmakers in the 1980s, known for *Sonatine* (1984), which won the Silver Lion at the 1984 Venice Film Festival, will address some of the issues regarding women’s filmmaking in Quebec. In the interview, Dulude-De Celles and Lanctôt discussed their professional experiences and divergent perspectives on the industry. Lanctôt expressed her reservations about the quota system, questioning whether it would bring about real change or might promote essentialism and actually limit creativity. In response, Dulude-De Celles took more radical position on equality policies: for her, quotas are a necessary step not only to ensure that women get to work and make their films, but also, further, to transform canonical ways of making films and narrating stories. In the same interview, Dulude-De Celles reflected on the structural difficulties women facing women filmmakers. In particular, she noted that even if her film school cohort had gender parity, very few women ended up working in the film industry. This was a pertinent topic after the publication of *Réalisatrices Équitables*’s report, mentioned earlier in the chapter (Lupien 2013). The difference between the number of women film students and the number of women-led projects funded by SODEC and Telefilm Canada attests to the institutional obstacles that female filmmakers encounter. By

⁴⁵ The documentary *L’Aventure Colonelle Films. Parcours de productrices québécoises* (Kalina Bertin 2020), presented at 2021 edition of the Cinémania Festival, provided a promotional portrait of Colonelle Films within the context of Quebec’s cinema funding mechanisms.

defending the quota system and embracing the language of “breaking the glass ceiling” (Dequen 2019, 68), Dulude-De Celles takes a liberal feminist approach adopted by many feminist-oriented filmmakers, which promotes individual achievement and inclusion within the existing structures of the film industry. Dulude-De Celles defines gender equality as women’s ability to access big budgets, and not be relegated to making only documentaries or intimate films. She also stresses her ability to “make do,” and crystallizes the idea of the entrepreneurial and self-made woman filmmaker. In this respect, Dulude-De Celles’ feminist approach to filmmaking is less a political project of radical transformation than assertion of female agency and ability to make films.

Dulude-De Celles’s affirmation of individual agency reflects her identity as an *auteur*, presenting her films as a form of subjective expression. In several interviews, she explained her interest in the adolescent rites of passage reflect her own adolescence and identity-formation process (Coulombe 2019, Dequen 2019). She explicitly identifies with the point of view of young francophone characters in rural Quebec, thus promoting the traditional auteurist approach organized around the idea of an exceptional individual personality.

Dulude-De Celles’s three films act as different chapters of a singular corpus that explores the theme of growing up. Throughout, she maintains a documentary style that focuses intimately on the young subjects in front of the camera (Daudelin 2019, Lemieux Lefebvre 2019). *La Coupe* is a thirteen minute long single take showing an intimate episode between a young girl and her father. The daughter playfully cuts her father’s hair until when she is called away to hang out with her friends. Throughout the short, different moods flow through and intermingle: enjoyment and excitement; fear of disappointing the parental figure; sadness; and solitude. Her documentary *Bienvenue à F.L.* follows the students engaged in a photo portrait project at Fernand-Lefebvre High School in Sorel-Tracy. The film is made up of individual interviews, and short *cinéma-verité* sequences that capture the students on the school bus, in the classroom, playing sports, and hanging out together. The interviews are shot talking-head style, which gives the teenagers, agency and a voice. The formal simplicity emphasizes the teenagers’ complexity, and their awareness of the social mechanizations of exclusion within the small world of high school. This documentary approach does not take a distanced observational style, but rather enters into their complicated social ecosystem. Dulude-De Celles maintains that embedded approach in *Une colonie*. A handheld camera follows the young Mylia and her sister Camille closely, foregrounding their bodies and the way they experience time and space. These three films have

established Dulude-De Celles as an *auteur* by the local press in Quebec and within the festivals where her films circulated. While her films foreground aspects of local Quebec culture (in terms of language, of socio-historical references, and landscapes), the reception at international festivals frame these films as a universal experience of growing up in the Global North, transcending the local experience.

This tension between the local and global is particularly relevant in *Une colonie*. The title alludes to Quebec's colonial history and postcolonial condition. Within the context of the Berlinale (Berlin International Film Festival), the film was presented in the Generation Kplus Competition, a section of the festival program whose focus is to showcase "films that demand bravery, displaying intersectional perspectives and encouraging collective solutions" (Berlinale, n.d.). Following the film's success at Berlinale, critical discourse has emphasized how the film portrays the coming-of-age story using the aesthetics of global art cinema: long-takes, minimal dialogue, and little narrative progression. However, the Mylia's story of identity formation heavily relies on its specific territorial and historical context. Indeed, the central narrative about Mylia—a young white girl—and Jimmy—an Abenaki boy—is locally specific. Set in the "contact-zone" of Pierreville, which overlaps with the Abenaki reservation of Odanak, the film invites if not an open critique, at least to a consideration of the power relations structuring the postcolonial condition of Quebec.⁴⁶ In this respect, I argue, Dulude-De Celles' phenomenological approach to the experience of growing-up challenges dominant narratives of Quebec and the nation. By privileging an embodied feminine perspective as a strategy of marking difference through the exploration of space and time as lived by the young protagonist, *Une colonie* addresses questions of Quebec national identity beyond a nationalist rhetoric that has failed to recognize the role of French-Canadians as settler colonizers. In the film, the individual and personal coming-of-age narrative is articulated within the underlying historical colonial legacy that structures the experience of everyday life in rural Quebec, acknowledging the role of francophone institutions in harming Indigenous peoples.

Une colonie is the story of Mylia, a taciturn 12-year-old girl dealing with the feeling of inadequacy, invisibility, and self-discovery that characterize teenagerhood. The first sequence

⁴⁶ Mary Pratt has defined "contact zones" as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in a highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism or slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (1991, 34).

introduces Camille, Mylia's younger sister, who plays with a small frog in a pond and then tries to rescue a dead chicken. The balanced combination of close-ups that capture the dirt of mud and earth on Camille's body and larger shots that follows with shaky camera-movements the small body in a summer rural landscape establishes the realist tone of the film. Soon, focus shifts from Camille to Mylia when the latter sees her younger sister surrounded and terrorized by an aggressive dog, while local teens mock her for carrying around a dead chicken. Jimmy, an indigenous boy, rescues Camille by petting the dog on its head. Thus, this initial sequence establishes the two main axes of Mylia's world: her relationship with her sister, and the friendship she develops with Jimmy. The film has a slow tempo and is structured in episodic sequences. The film follows Mylia who starts high school and deals with shifting modes of femininity through the interactions with her female schoolmates. Throughout the film, Mylia also experiences her parent's marriage fall apart, ending in divorce. Through it all, Jimmy becomes a constant presence in Mylia's life, a friend, a supporter, and a rescuer.

The film foregrounds Mylia's subjective and embodied experience, particularly her negotiations with the socially coded experience of femininity. The camera closely follows her, and defines space and temporality according to Mylia's perception. It lingers on Mylia's physical traits, like the texture of her blond hair in a ponytail, or follows her physical reactions and her gestures while she runs her hand along surfaces in moments of discomfort. With her sister, she engages in physical activities such as dancing, biking, playing outside, petting animals. She wears loose, comfortable clothing, denoting her as a tomboy, although her gender identity is never ambiguous. At the same time, Mylia experiments with femininity: loosening her hair, wearing make-up, and getting a makeover when she hangs out with some new girl friends. The narrative and cinematography foreground female desire and agency, yet they also stress that Mylia's physical development is closely tied to the land she lives on. Her trajectory of growing-up heavily depends on her relation with Jimmy, and is thus profoundly linked to the territory and the land in Quebec. When for the first time Mylia goes to Jimmy's place very early in the film, a long take horizontally tracks Camille biking and Mylia walking toward Jimmy's house. It concludes with a medium shot from behind Mylia, at the left of the frame, looking at the sign for Odenak at the centre of the frame. The road sign indexes the border with the Indigenous reserve of Odenak (Fig. 6) and, thus, the legacy of settler colonialism in Quebec. While the sign does not imply a physical boundary for Mylia, the white character, it represents the vestiges of colonial

history that mapped and contained Indigenous lands and hints at its function as an instrument of control, separation, and exclusion that still determines systemic racism in Quebec.



Figure 6 *Une Colonie*. Screenshot.

Borders and boundaries are a recurrent theme in the film. One example is when Mylia first enters the “History and Education to Citizenship” classroom in her new school. It is within the context of the class that Mylia and Jimmy’s relationship is negotiated in relation to a larger historic-political backdrop. Two sequences take place in the class, and they illuminate how education perpetuates the political and ideological violence of settler colonialism. In the first class, the teacher explains that “one is not born a citizen, but you have to become one” and provides a strict definition of citizenship as living in a society according to the parameters of the nation-state. In the second class, the teacher makes her students learn and discuss about Indigenous populations from an Eurocentric perspective, reading accounts from the first European explorers on the American continent. The approach to the subject matter enrages and distresses Jimmy. When he challenges the teacher and disrupts the class, he hopes Mylia will support him. Instead, she obeys to the teacher’s invitation to read from the book. The sequence confronts the francophone educational system’s incapability of decolonizing itself, perpetuating violent colonial relationships and the mechanisms that eradicate Indigenous history and culture. As the title of the film itself reminds, Quebec too is a settler colonial society. This underlying colonial critique traverses the film and becomes a crucial aspect of Mylia’s coming-of-age. By making Mylia’s relationship with the Indigenous “other” central to her process of identity formation, *Une colonie* challenges a Quebec national identity historically based on the dismissal and the denial of Indigenous populations. Thus, the film rejects a *pure laine* vision of Quebec identity.

In the last sequence of the film, Mylia, who has moved to Montreal with her mother, walks around the courtyard of her new school. She follows the boundary lines drawn on the ground used for marking off a field for games. In a voiceover, she reads a letter to Jimmy and says many of her classmates have immigrant backgrounds, but none are Indigenous. She recounts her geography course, where she learned about European colonialism in Africa. Because of her previous confrontations with Jimmy, she is able to implicitly associate that story with land's exploitation and evictions of Indigenous peoples by European settler-colonists in Canada. The scene juxtaposes of the artificial borders created for games and the artificial boundaries enforced by colonialism. Together these small reflections point at how, ultimately, Mylia has learnt to recognize the complicity of national infrastructures in perpetuating the colonial project as much as she has learnt to refute whiteness as a universal signifier for Quebec national identity.

Even if Mylia undergoes a process of self-decolonization, though, the film exclusively foregrounds her gaze and gestures, and thus maintains a white female's privilege of mobility and relationship to the land, leaving very little room for Indigenous perspectives. The white female standpoint posited in the film requires a further interrogation of Dulude-De Celles' accountability to her filmmaking practice and critique of French-Canadian identity. Indeed, even if *Une colonie* does not present marks of authorial self-inscription, Dulude-De Celles' explicit formal choices and extra-textual strategies of control establish her authorial signature over the film, thus endorsing a model of authorship connected with the idea of subjective expression. For this reason, the limitations of Mylia's embodied perspective can be mapped onto questions about the role of Dulude-De Celles as a white female auteur. Yet, while Dulude-De Celles' does not explicitly question her privileged standpoint as a white filmmaker, she has repeatedly accounted for her methods of Indigenous representation. She consulted and worked collaboratively with the youth committee of Odenak, who evaluated her screenplay (Coulombe 2019; Roy-Poirier 2019). In this sense, Dulude-De Celles distances herself from dominant national film practices, reframing white femininity's gaze on Indigenous population and admitting its role in the colonial process of national identity formation in Quebec.

Conclusion

Taken together, *Sarah préfère la course*, *Antigone*, and *Une colonie* deterritorialize the discourse of identity in Quebec cinema through female characters that refuse normative and fixed gendered positions and therefore defy normative constructions of national culture and politics. In this respect, I find that Sarah, Antigone, and Mylia occupy an “eccentric” subject position, which feminist philosopher Teresa de Lauretis defines as the one “not contained by the sociocultural institution of heterosexuality” (1990, 127). de Lauretis, drawing on postcolonial theorists, expands on this, writing that the eccentric subject position implies a

dis-placement and a self-displacement: leaving or giving up a place that is safe, that is "home" physically, emotionally, linguistically, epistemologically - for another place that is unknown and risky, that is not only emotionally but conceptually other; a place of discourse from which speaking and thinking are at best tentative, uncertain, unguaranteed. (de Lauretis 1990, 138)

de Lauretis further elaborates on this process of displacement as it implies “a remapping of boundaries between bodies and discourses, identities and communities” (1990, 138). Each in a different way, Sarah, Antigone, and Maya undergo a process displacement that redesigns and rejects dominant identitarian imaginaries in Quebec: Sarah exits the institution of heteronormativity and “reorients” herself towards queer desire; Antigone not only is literally displaced but she also partially disturbs fixed gender expectations of femininity and refuses to adhere to the dehumanizing state and judicial power that regulate immigrants; Mylia partially rejects feminine girlhood and refuses to omit historical colonial power relations.

Thus, the films analyzed in this chapter articulate local narratives situated in the specificity of Quebec socio-cultural context that is displaced from national concerns, and therefore can address the cosmopolitan audiences of film festivals. The figure of the global woman filmmaker, who affirms her agency by actively controlling auteurist discourses that frame the reception of her film, plays a crucial role in drawing attention to the global nature of Quebec cinema. The successful circulation of these films in prestigious international festivals challenges Quebec’s peripheral status (Marshall 2010) within world cinema and *cinéma-monde*. In this chapter, I have considered Robichaud, Deraspe, and Dulude DeCelles’s authorial practice as a strategy of personal affirmation, while they navigate their role within the international film festival circuit. Methodologically, I have analyzed extra-textual materials to show how these

filmmakers construct their authorial personae and have done a close reading of their films to illustrate their negotiation of identity, both as Quebeckers and female filmmakers. By looking at both their comments and concerns about the Quebec film industry and their working practices, I have shown how Robichaud, Deraspe, and Dulude-De Celles negotiate their position as global women directors within the specificity of the structures and the discourses on gender equality in Quebec film industry. The directors express discomfort at labelling their work “women’s cinema,” which might limit its distribution or color its reception. Yet, they also provide their own personal definition of women’s cinema and situate their work in relation to it. While they refuse explicit affiliations with feminist cinema, their films’ narratives that explore the borders of gender and sexual identities and challenge hegemonic construction of national identity through modernist strategies. Thus, with their films, they reshape the imagery of the representation of femininities in Quebec cinema.

CHAPTER 3

Minor Transnationalism in Quebec Women's Cinema: Diasporic Filmmaking Practices¹

With a large immigrant population from francophone countries, including Maghreb and West Africa, Quebec is the home of several female film directors emigrated from elsewhere. Even though some of them have had long professional careers in Quebec, they receive limited theatrical distribution in Quebec and Canada, and their films do not circulate through Quebec's feminist media distributors or associations such as GIV or Réalisatrices Équitables. Moreover (and perhaps because of this), their work has been overlooked in feminist scholarship on Quebec cinema, and the gendered dimensions of diasporic filmmaking in Quebec ignored by cinema scholars of intercultural cinema in Quebec. Not just have immigrant female filmmakers been understudied and deserve attention, they also contest normative constructions of "woman" and dominant histories of feminism. In Quebec, both women's cinema and feminist discourse has defined their political subject as white and francophone, creating a strong link between nation, race, and gender. They have thus homogenized women's experience and overlooked the positionality of Indigenous and immigrant women. Therefore, the stories, experiences, and work of immigrant directors articulate a much-needed angle to examine Quebec feminism and the film industry, and the changing face of Quebec identity. The roles and the cinematic practices of these diasporic filmmakers signal both a rejection and a critique of hegemonic Quebec feminist cinema. Within the broader context of this dissertation, I see the diasporic filmmaking practices as emerging contributions to contemporary feminist discourses in the francophonie, which are currently integrating transnational and intersectional perspectives, thus potentially decentralizing homogenizing tendencies of global francophone feminism. Drawing on Cho's understanding of the diasporic subject position as a "condition of subjectivity" determined by "histories of colonialism, and imperialism, [...] and processes of racialization" (2007, 14), I consider how filmmakers are attuned, even in an oblique way, to such histories and processes in their

¹ Preliminary findings of the research conducted for this chapter were initially shared at the Gerald Pratley keynote address at the Film Studies Association of Canada conference in 2022. I am deeply grateful to the FSAC community for their feedback. Another version of this research was presented at the online conference Thinking Gender 2023 organized by the University of California Los Angeles, where I received very generous feedback and invaluable support from my co-panellists and the chair.

filmmaking practices.² In this chapter, I specifically examine the female directors Gentile M. Assih, Hejer Charf, and Maryanne Zéhil. Each migrated to Canada from former French colonies and developed their filmmaking practices in Quebec.³ I consider their distinctive position within the Quebec film industry and the transnational context of Francophone cinema, drawing on a theoretical framework informed by decolonial feminism. I ask: How do diasporic filmmakers seek professional acknowledgement within Quebec cinema? How do female filmmakers from diasporic communities position their work within the major networks of feminist film culture in Quebec? How do they formally articulate their cultural identity from a gender-specific perspective?

Gentile M. Assih, Hejer Charf, and Maryanne Zéhil are immigrant filmmakers, respectively, from Togo, Tunisia and Lebanon in the late 1990s and 2000s. Each followed a different migratory trajectory, but they have all received formal film training and moved to Quebec to pursue a filmmaking career in the last two decades. Similarly, they have made major films in that period across art, auteur, and popular registers. They directed documentary films, experimental documentaries, and fiction feature films, respectively, which used different modes of production, but they all tackle intercultural and intersectional identity. Yet, they received little critical attention and remain relatively unknown by Quebec audiences.⁴ Within this context, Assih, Charf, and Zéhil find strategies to affirm their professional agency, especially through the establishment of their own production companies. Moreover, by negotiating diasporic identity within the hegemonic framework of Quebec cinema, Assih, Charf, and Zéhil propose non-essentializing perspectives on femininity, feminism and postcolonial identity in Quebec. They critique dominant feminist discourses in two ways: first, their films take a gender-specific perspective to foreground intercultural and intersectional themes, thus making an intervention within Quebec cinema and, at the same time, contributing to the field of diasporic filmmaking

² I am indebted here to critical race and gender scholar Beenash Jafri, who has drawn on Cho's definition of diaspora as a "condition of subjectivity" to study the practices of refusal of dominant settler colonial understandings of nationhood and sovereignty developed by South Asian diasporic filmmaker Ali Kazim's in solidarity with Indigenous politics (2020).

³ To be more precise, one of the filmmakers examined in this chapter, Maryanne Zéhil, comes from Lebanon, which was never a proper French colony, but a territory that fell under the rule of the French mandate in 1920 *de facto* terminated after the end of World War II.

⁴ Among the three filmmakers taken in consideration in this chapter, the one that has received more visibility among mainstream audiences is Maryanne Zéhil, whose films were partially funded by the television private network SuperÉcran, which has consequently broadcasted these films. Yet, the other films discussed in this chapter mostly circulated within specialized circuits, such as women's organizations and women's film festivals, academic women's and gender programs across North American universities, or in theaters abroad (notably France, Tunisia, Lebanon).

practices. Secondly, immigrant filmmakers problematize Quebec's feminist circles and circuits of promotion, like *Réalisatrices Équitables*, that tokenize women filmmakers from diasporic communities by placing them in categories informed by positive discrimination, instead of more broadly reviewing the historical formations that have created uneven power relations among different groups of people.

In this chapter, drawing on the theoretical framework of decolonial feminism, I will first illustrate how Quebec women's cinema and its feminist-informed discourse have proposed a universalizing perspective on gender, which has occulted the complicity of francophone women in the settler colonial project and immigrant xenophobia. Against this backdrop, I will then situate my analysis of diasporic women's filmmaking practices within the framework of "minor transnationalism." This concept, as theorized by Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, describes "micropractices of transnationality" by minority and diasporic peoples that exceed "vertical relationship of opposition or assimilation" to majority cultures (2005, 7). In other words, by defining "creative interventions that networks of minoritized cultures produce within and across national boundaries" (2005, 7), minor transnationalism captures the formal and thematic interventions as well as professional strategies of female diasporic filmmakers situated in Quebec and whose work circulate across francophone transnational circuits. Gentille M. Assih, Hejer Charf, and Maryanne Zéhil elaborate, from their position of immigrant filmmakers working in the infrastructures of Quebec cinema, original strategies of professional affirmation and filmic forms that counter a tradition of women's cinema that has narrowly focused on the issues of white francophone women. Through their practices, these filmmakers engage in geographical, linguistic, and transnational border crossing, reflecting on the gendered dimensions of migratory flows and foregrounding the fragmented experience of immigrant subjects. By addressing these issues, they implicitly or explicitly respond to the discourse of "interculturalism" in Quebec society, and, more specifically, contribute to intercultural themes in Quebec cinema.⁵

Francophone Feminism: A Decolonial Approach

Francophone feminism, both as a socio-political movement and a corpus of theoretical writing, has historically overlooked the legacy of colonization. This is particularly striking considering that deep roots anticolonial theory has in Francophone cultural theory. Frantz Fanon and Aimé

⁵ As illustrated later on in this chapter, I make a distinction between "interculturalism" as a policy in Quebec and "intercultural cinema" as a theoretical framework developed in film studies.

Cesaire, foundational anticolonial thinkers, were both engaged with the anti-colonial struggles of the 1960s and 1970s against France. They eloquently articulated national liberation from Western imperialism within the larger process of decolonization. For them, that entailed both cultural and subjective transformation to redefine uneven power relations between colonizers and the colonized people. While their powerful writing inspired many other writers and thinkers to continue their efforts, it made little impression on mainstream French feminist movement, which embraced universalizing understanding of feminist politics and ignored the specific struggles of the independence movements in the French colonies.

Very far from France, in South America, decolonial feminism emerged. Annibal Quijano's writing about global capitalism as the legacy of colonialism inspired other feminists to follow suit and take a decolonial stance (2000). In María Lugones' words, decolonial feminism adopts "the modern, colonial, gender system as a lens through which to theorize further the oppressive logic of colonial modernity, its use of hierarchical dichotomies and categorical logic" (2010, 742). Decolonial feminism theorizes the gender-based dichotomies, hierarchies, divisions of labour, and power relations as embedded within the historical process of colonialism. As such, decolonial feminism requires that any critique of patriarchy, sexism, and heteronormativity develops alongside a racial critique of global late capitalism. In general, any decolonial intellectual and political endeavour analyzes the material legacies of colonization in specific historico-political contexts, including the ways in which knowledge production is circulated. More specifically, then, a decolonial approach to feminism examines how the circulation of feminist theory and politics are also imbricated within longer historical processes of colonization.⁶

Only recently, in the last fifteen years, have feminist historians and philosophers from within the *francosphere* challenged the universalizing understanding of feminist politics and attempted to decolonize French-centric feminism. Feminist scholar Françoise Vergès proposes the term "*féminisme décolonial*" (decolonial feminism) to question Western-centric epistemologies and approaches to patriarchal oppression, and as set of practices committed to

⁶ In the introduction to her curated anthology *Decolonizing Feminism: Transnational Feminism and Globalization*, Margareth McLaren builds on the critical work and anti-racist practices proposed by Quijano, Lugones, and Mohanty to identify *decolonizing* as "an awareness of the effects of colonization not only as political, historical, and economic forces but also as effects on consciousness, theories, research practices, epistemological frameworks, ways of knowing." (2017, 4). Moreover, McLaren foregrounds the work of Indigenous political theorists, including among others, Taiake Alfred and Glen Coulthard, that have brought attention to Indigenous people's epistemologies as forms of resistance against the violence of settler colonialism.

study “the ways in which the nexus of racism, sexism, and ethnicity pervade any dominant relation of power” (2019, 27). Focusing on the colonial and postcolonial context of France, Vergès’ makes an original contribution within debates of decolonial feminism by providing a language to theorize in French critiques of racial capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and mainstream feminist histories. Vergès has dubbed mainstream feminist discourse that has been historically intertwined with the imperialist project during colonization as “*féminisme civilisationnel*” (civilizational feminism) (2018, chapter 2), which is entangled within the neoliberal order, nationalist discourse, and systemic racism in France. To oppose this trend of feminism, Vergès proposes to investigate the historical complicity of the women’s movement with the colonial project at the end of the turn of the twentieth century. Moreover, Vergès critiques the feminist analysis developed within the *Mouvement de Liberation des Femmes* (MLF) in the 1970s, which took the division between men and women as an absolute and universal form of oppression, failing to deconstruct colonial histories and to integrate the specificity of other systems of oppression, especially racial.⁷ In particular, Vergès criticizes the MLF’s focus on male domination and the use of the metaphor that compared women, understood as an homogenous social class, to slaves, obfuscating the specificity of the history of slavery and of actual colonial relations (chapter 2). Yet, Vergès’ proposition of a decolonial feminism is not framed as a new wave of feminism and is instead grounded in a historiographical project aimed at centering the perspective of the colony (2019, 29) and at recovering forms of feminist solidarity in the revolutionary anti-colonial struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. This work can eventually re-establish the critical force of feminism as a socio-political and cultural movement that sees anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, and anti-patriarchal struggles as strictly connected. Vergès’ proposition invites to question similar dominant forms of liberal feminism in Quebec, and, by extension, to investigate, in the realm of cinema, to what extent feminist film culture in Quebec has tied a gender-focused critique of patriarchy to recognition of colonial and racialized constructions of nation building.

Tunisian scholar Soumaya Mestiri similarly considers “decolonial feminism” within the francophone context. Drawing on Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa and philosopher María Lugones, Mestiri defines decolonial feminism as “*féminisme de la frontière*,” (“feminism of the

⁷ Officially founded in 1970, the Women’s Liberation Movement in France emerged out of the frustration with the inability of addressing gender-specific issues within the political collectives during 1968.

borderland”), which counters the liberal universalism of Western feminism (2016).⁸ The borderland, for Mestiri, is not a hard restricting border, but as an open porous space, a contact zone, where the feminist subject finds themselves in a position of in-betweenness. Instead of solidarity among women defined through comparison, like the Western project of transnational feminism, Mestiri conceives of solidarity in the borderland where the acceptance and awareness of inescapable difference becomes the foundation for solidarity. According to Mestiri, “for decolonial feminism, it is impossible to think of a common global feminist project” and its primary aim is “to allow people to exist outside the oppressing universalizing narrative of modernity and coloniality” (2016, Chapter 5). Mestiri’s embrace of difference among women can work as a heuristic exhortation for the development of more nuanced analysis of gender oppression and resistance in Quebec, which historically centered on the experience of white francophone women.

In Quebec, decolonial feminism reveals the racial and ethnic fault lines in majoritarian feminist discourse that has not addressed difference among women and its larger complicity with the settler colonial project. Naima Hamroumi and Chantalle Maillé’s edited collection *Le sujet du féminisme, est-il blanc?* (2016), notes the lack of research on racialized women in Quebec francophone feminism. They write, “la question de la race demeure en effet faiblement théorisée dans le contexte particulier de la société québécoise, alors que le récit nationalitaire a occupé presque tout l’espace de réflexion en lien avec les enjeux identitaires” (13).⁹ In her chapter, Maillé further explains that the difficulties of articulating an intersectional feminist analysis in Quebec depends on two main intertwined factors. On one hand, given the prominence of the national question, there is a general lack of theorization of class and race in Quebec and consequently the “inarticulation des catégories de race et de classe avec les réalités propres aux femmes” (156).¹⁰ On the other hand, feminist theory in French has not developed proper

⁸ Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa, building on her experience of growing up on the Mexico-Texas border and through a poetic language that often recurs to the use of metaphors, has theorized hybrid subjectivity as a form of resistance against the oppressive, violent, and excluding logics of bordered thinking (1987). María Lugones, acknowledging Anzaldúa’s writing as central in the development of her own thinking, has explained the “*mestiza*” (in-between) consciousness theorized by Anzaldúa as “characterized by the development of a tolerance for contradiction and ambiguity, by the transgression of rigid conceptual boundaries, and by the creative breaking of the new unitary aspect of new and old paradigms. The *mestiza* consciousness participates in the creation of a new value system through an “uprooting of dualistic thinking (80)” (Lugones, 1992, p. 34).

⁹ “The question of race has been poorly theorized in the particular context of Quebec society since the nationalist discourse was dominated the reflection on identitarian issues” (Auhtor’s translation).

¹⁰ “The lack of articulation of race and class within women’s issues” (author’s translation). In the same chapter, Maillé illustrates that the national question has determined the analysis of social classes in Quebec history within a

postcolonial and intersectional approaches. Chantal Maillé demonstrates that even the Marxist feminist perspective developed in Quebec throughout the 1970s, for example political scientist Anne Legaré's work, was based on an understanding of the class divisions between the Anglophone Canadian nation as the "oppressor" and the "exploiter" of the French-Canadian people: class and national struggles were thus strictly intertwined (163–68).¹¹ Even if a Marxist analysis within Quebec feminist can be considered as a good basis for the development of further investigations on the intersections of gender with other axes of oppression, it also demonstrates, precisely for its conflation of class struggle with national identity, the difficulty of integrating a critical examination of oppressive power relations based on race. In general, notes Maillé, the influence of universalist academic references imported from France in Quebec-based social sciences prevented the formation of sustained discussions of race as a social construct that has material consequences on the determination of social power relations. Hence, the terms used in Quebec public discourse and social sciences, such as "communautés culturelles," "femmes immigrantes", and "diversité," are critically assessed by Maillé as diversions from an actual appraisal of racism (171). Maillé concludes that "un travail de relecture de l'histoire s'impose ici pour inscrire la présence des groupes minoritaires à l'intérieur de la société québécoise" (173).¹²

A decolonial feminist perspective, in sum, invites to foreground colonial histories and alternative epistemologies to Western-centric narratives of modernity and value systems. As such, this framework illuminates how feminist histories and theorizations originated from France still largely dominate the field of feminist studies in French, within the francophone space at large. At the same time, in the specific context of Quebec, decolonial feminism opens up a space of reflection on how the lack of proper theorizations of gender oppression as embedded within larger colonial and settler colonial power relations among different racialized and ethnic groups within the social fabric of Quebec has influenced the development of feminist culture and has overlooked not only the experience and the contributions of racialized women, but also their cultural expression and contribution to feminist culture from within more expansive perspectives. In the following section, I examine "women's cinema" in Quebec as the expression of cultural

narrative that has at its center *la Conquête de 1759-1760*, which is the military conquest of the French colony Nouvelle France by the British army, and that has used the terms colonizer/colonized to describe the relationships between Anglophones and Francophones in this region (158-162).

¹¹ A Marxist feminist analysis of social relations foregrounds the gendered division of labour between productive and reproductive labour as fundamental and crucial to capitalism.

¹² "It is necessary to undertake a reassessment of Quebec history in order to integrate minoritized groups as part of Quebec society." (Author's translation)

feminism through film and video is largely consistent with dominant francophone feminist analysis in the province that has not articulated the intersections of gender oppression with settler colonialism and larger postcolonial power relations.

Francophone Feminism and Women's Cinema in Quebec

French-language feminist discourses and practices in Quebec emerged during the political and cultural turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s and the formation of the “Quebecois” national identity.¹³ As succinctly put by Lamoureux, in that period “francophone feminists articulated their definition of feminism within the radical nationalism of the time” (2018, 190). By doing so, they adopted the discourse of nationalist (de)colonization (intended, at that time, as the colonization of the French-Canadians by the Anglophones). Francophone feminist writers, artists, and filmmakers, influenced by French feminism, wanted to invent a new language to counter the dominant patriarchal language that had structurally and historically excluded women as subjects of discourse (Langston 2004).¹⁴ Women filmmakers in Quebec explored how film was a language to depict women's desires, their needs, and their perspectives. In doing so, they were countering a cinematic imaginary that either perpetuated traditional models of femininity or that was using the “liberated” body of women at the service of the male subject as an allegory of modernity.¹⁵ Yet, they also contributed to a national imaginary that highlighted whiteness and the “colonized” French people, occluding the complicity with settler colonialism.

Women's cinema in Quebec represents a strong established tradition of practices, theoretical concepts, and reception frameworks. Feminist approaches to filmmaking were at first explored within the National Film Board in the series of six films *En tant que femmes* produced by Anne Claire Poirier and Jeanne Morazin between 1972 and 1976, among the most known and discussed examples of second-wave feminist cinematic practice. Poirier and Morazin wanted to counter both the NFB's masculine environment and interests and the masculinity of the film

¹³ This was also discussed in my introduction and Chapter 1.

¹⁴ This tradition of “écriture féminine” à la québécoise is best expressed in the work of writers such as Louky Bersianik, France Théoret, Monique Gagnon, Nicole Brossard, who in the 1970s and 1980s, pushed the limits of patriarchal language through experimental literary forms that foregrounded gendered questions in the construction of Quebec national identity (Gilbert-Lewis 1985, Langston 2004, Massimi 2015, Longfellow 2019).

¹⁵ Women's sexual liberation was a central aspect within the discourses of national liberation during the Quiet Revolution in Quebec (Lamoureux 1983, Vacante 2005). In this respect, Julie Ravary-Pilon has examined how the conflation of sexual liberation with national liberation has been reflected in a corpus of film that have used the female body as a metaphor standing for the Quebec nation (2018, 53-85.). The three films analysed by Ravary-Pilon are *Valérie* (Denis Héroux, 1968), *Q-bec my love* (Jean Pierre Lefebvre 1969), and *La vraie nature de Bernadette* (Gilles Carle, 1972).

language itself. The documentary films, each directed by a different woman, used an experimental style, mixing fiction and documentary, conventional talking-heads interviews, cinéma-verité sequences, and oneiric interludes to portray their reality and experiences. Challenging traditional documentary conventions and thus relying on modernist formal strategies and a self-reflexive style, Brenda Longfellow (2019), writes, the six films of the series “were [...] concerned with a politics of language and formal expression [...] incorporating what might be understood as a specifically *Québécoise* feminist modernism” (Longfellow 2019).

Les filles du roy, directed by Anne Claire Poirier in 1974, is probably the series’ most remembered and discussed film. Its elaborate style combines fictional and documentary sequences to narrate the history of the Quebec nation from a female perspective. Poirier forefronts the female labour that contributed to the maintenance of the Quebec nation, and counters male-centric definitions and representations of female subjectivities and body. The film begins with the story of the “filles du roy” (“kings’ daughters”): young women sent by the King of France Louis XIV to the new territories to encourage men to settle there and have families. The female voice-over, self-identified as a “fille du roy,” reads a letter to men, illustrated by archival images, *cinéma-verité* sequences, and symbolic staged sequences. It provides an overview of the different roles women were relegated to in the construction of the Quebec nation, reconstructs women’s stories privileging matriarchal lineages, and, at the same time, interrogates the ways in which women have been defined in the national project. The film opens on a snowy landscape, the camera panning in way that visually reproduces the swishing sound of the winter wind. The camera also zooms in and out, replicating the gaze of an explorer trying to survey the landscape. The scene dissolves into other landscapes, also empty of humans. The female voice-over describes how men saw this land, devoid of women, as a place to be conquered, while French women waited in the motherland to be sent in the New World to populate it. Only in the fourth shot of this initial sequence, in a forest covered in snow, do we hear, off-screen, footsteps—later shown to be an Indigenous woman’s. The “fille du roy” comments that the presence of Indigenous people did not stop male the French colonizers from considering the territory as “new” and ready to be “civilized.” The voice-over identifies with the silent Indigenous woman—who eventually appears emerging from the forest—based on the shared female function of reproduction and on the condition of being “la femme d’un conqui, un

colonisé” (00:03:41).¹⁶ While in the rest of the film, the voice-over tries to challenge a narrative of national construction based on the building of the heteronormative family by granting agency and subjecthood to women, the initial sequence, nonetheless, elides the complicity of French-Canadian women with the project of settler colonialism, suggesting instead a very problematic kinship between Indigenous and Quebec women as equally colonized, and thus overlooking the role that French women also had in colonization.¹⁷ In this respect, the film also participates in the consolidation of national myths and dominant, exclusionary definitions the Quebec nation as inherently white and francophone. As Gittins comments: “Poirier’s gendering of Quebec as a colonized white woman produces a problematic signification inserting whiteness as a universal signifier for Quebec nation and absolving women of any complicity in the colonial project” (2002, 267).¹⁸ Such an analysis of *Les filles du roy* concurs with a decolonial feminism’s analysis of gendered power relation, which illuminates how settler colonialism shapes other forms of sexism and racism and expose its “powerful effects on Indigenous people and other” (Arvin et al., 2013, 9).¹⁹

The example of *Les filles du roy* is, on the one hand, emblematic of a tradition of women’s cinema in Quebec that, in the 1970s and 1980s, not only at the NFB but also in the independent sector, explored modernist film forms to challenge and counter codified and abstract images of woman within Quebec nationalist discourse. For example, as Chantal Nadeau argues,

¹⁶ “The wife of a conquered, colonized man” (Author’s translation).

¹⁷ Settler colonialism is a process that naturalizes colonial structures. While colonialism is a historical event, settler colonialism persists in the ongoing elimination of Indigenous populations, and juridical control over their lands (Wolfe 1998, Veracini 2010).

¹⁸ Throughout his book *Canadian National Cinema*, Gittins examines “cinematic constructions of femininity and masculinity in [his] considerations of the cinema of invasion and settlement, ethnographic cinema, and genre texts” (2002, 263). His analysis of *Les Filles du Roy* is inserted in the chapter “Screening Gender and Sexuality” as an example of women’s cinema as counter-cinema that has challenged dominant patriarchal and phallogocentric construction of national identity in Canadian cinema. Indeed, in relation to Poirier’s film analyzed above, while Gittins is critical of the film’s construction of Quebec national identity as inherently white, he also recognizes that, in *Les Filles du Roy*, “Poirier’s female voice-over interrogates phallogocentric representations of women, producing a counter-discourse interrupting these male mythologies of female subjectivity” (269).

¹⁹ Within the context of settler colonialism in North America, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang warns against the current trend of “decolonizing” as a stand-for-all for “things we want to do to improve our societies and schools” and remind us that decolonization “brings about repatriation of Indigenous and life.” In other words, any research in the humanities and social sciences that claims to undertake any “decolonizing” approach should namely center Indigenous experiences and epistemologies (Tuck and Yang 2012, 1). Similarly, more recently, Roopika Risam has argued that decolonization must not be used as stand-in “for commitment to diversity,” but that, instead, any decolonizing effort must center the struggle for sovereignty and the experience of Indigenous people, especially within the settler colonial state of Canada (2022, 137). Rita Dhamoon has also stressed that the analysis of how Indigenous women have been marginalized “not just as women but also as subjects marked by racism, [sexism], and colonialism” (Dhamoon 2011, 232) must remain crucial in any critique to dominant liberal feminism frameworks.

films such as *La Vie Revey* and *La Cuisine Rouge* “were not engaging explicitly with the national question” but were defining social and political spheres through a female gaze that was “displacing traditional representations of women” (Nadeau 1999, 204). In this respect, women’s cinema in Quebec has effectively countered masculinist constructions and narratives of Quebec national identity (Nadeau 1999). Yet, on the other hand, *Les filles du roy* is also symptomatic of a larger feminist climate in Quebec that has articulated women’s liberation within a nationalist discourse without a sustained critique of feminism as complicit with the (settler) colonial project of nation building.

Within this context, I contend that women filmmakers from former French colonies working in Quebec contribute, from their diasporic experience and through their filmmaking practices, to the effort of reconfiguring the women’s cinema’s political project of articulating gender with and through processes of racialization, outside the exclusionary definitions of nation building in Quebec. Even if they do not necessarily embrace the anti-colonial and anti-imperialism activist stand of Post-Third Worldist feminist film culture, they focus on transnational feminist cultural histories (Charf) or the everyday experiences of diasporic subjects confronting the trauma of cultural adaptation to and the new power dynamics of the host society (Assih, Zéhil). These filmmakers propose new arrangements and understandings of femininities and feminism within francophone Quebec that can open a space to challenge the hegemonic position of women’s cinema within Quebec national culture and identity writ-large.²⁰

Minor Transnationalism

The work of women diasporic filmmakers in Quebec addresses gender politics and representation of femininities in relation to displacement and migration and, thus, opens up a space for new cinematic communities defined outside dominant constructions of gender and national identity. They are “minor,” meaning creative, resourceful, original, and often contrasting vis-à-vis dominant national(ist) culture in Quebec, established traditions of women’s cinema in Quebec, and other immigrant cinema in Quebec and elsewhere. From their “minor” position within Quebec cinema, these filmmakers critique not only fixed notions of identity in Quebec, but also

²⁰ In a landmark essay in feminist film theory titled “Post-Third Worldist Culture: Gender, Nation, and the Cinema,” Ella Shohat analyses a corpus of films from the 1990s that signal a new paradigm within post-Third Worldist film culture marked by the refusal of both Western-centric universalizing of womanhood and feminism, and of Third Worldist masculine anticolonial struggles grounded in modernity and nationalism. According to Shohat, “post-Third Worldist cultural theories and practices create a more complex space for feminisms, open to the specificity of community culture and history” (1997, 186).

major practices of women's cinema within and across national boundaries that rely on Western-centric universalizing constructions of womanhood and feminism. They refuse to embrace dominant, liberal, and conciliatory views of interculturalism; and they bring forward racialized women's stories and desires outside Western-centric feminist frameworks and the gendered experience of diasporic migration in Quebec. I find that the concept of minor transnationalism best describes the position of these filmmakers both in relation to Quebec cinema and to transnational women's cinema. To theorize a "minor transnationalism," I first outline theorizations of "minor cinema," before I flesh out my definition through the examples of diasporic filmmaking practices considered in this chapter.

Minor cinema is a capacious concept that embraces processes of transformation of hegemonic culture and forms of identity, fostering new, fluid, unfixed subject positions. For this reason, minor cinema has been applied as an umbrella term to define those cinematic cultures that are situated in conversation with dominant cinema, but bend its production, formal, and thematic conventions. Discussions of "minor cinema" have developed in film studies from Deleuze and Guattari's definition of "minor literature" as "what a minority constructs within a majority language" (1975, 16). There are two main threads within theorizations of minor cinema: minor cinema as it relates to women's cinema, and minor cinema in terms of its geopolitical position. The first adapts Deleuze and Guattari's definition of "minor literature," (Butler 2002; White 2008; Stam 2019) to describe the fluidity and adaptivity of gendered filmmaking. The second more specifically indicates the cinema produced within distinct minor national and cultural formations (Hjort 2005, White 2018).

From a gender-specific perspective, the concept of minor has served to describe women's cinema methods of production and its relationships to cinematic traditions. Alison Butler builds on Deleuze and Guattari's definition of minor literature to describe women's cinema as a "minor cinema," which moves away from definitions of women's cinema as primarily associated with feminist, gender-focused aesthetics and counter-practices.²¹ She instead brings forward the plurality of forms and the situated experiences of contemporary women filmmakers as deterritorializing practices (Butler 2002, 19–22). She finds Deleuze and Guattari's idea of collective value particularly relevant:

²¹ The three main characteristics of minor literature described by Deleuze and Guattari and summarized by Butler are: "displacement, dispossession or [...] deterritorialisation; a sense of everything as political; and a tendency for everything to take on a collective value" (Butler 2002, 20).

The notion of a minor literature as involved in the *projection* of a community rather than its *expression* is especially useful to the argument that the existence of a woman's cinema need not to be premised on an essentialist understanding of the category "women." The communities imagined by women's cinema are as many and varied as the films it comprises, and each is involved in its own historical moment. Thinking of some women's cultural production as minor...posits a mediated and contestatory relationship (2002, 21).

Hence, in Butler's definition, women's cinema as minor cinema relates to historically specific imagined communities. Therefore, women's cinema is not bound to counter-practices, but nonetheless is "not at home in any of the host cinematic or national discourse it inhabits" (2002, 22). Women's cinema, she describes, is "an inflected mode, incorporating, reworking and contesting the conventions of established traditions" (2002, 27).

Patricia White applies the term "minor" to describe practices and aesthetics of lesbian filmmakers who work outside of mainstream methods, technologies, and structures, but harness the limited means available to them. For White, "minor" resonates with "queer," as far as both terms "inflect rather than oppose the dominant" and "deterritorialize sexuality and expression" (2008, 411–12). Defining "minor cinema as "making use of limited resources in a politicized way" (2008, 413), Patricia White emphasizes how it is a subversive cinema that engages with less-explored genres, formats, and technologies. Thus, Patricia White's understanding of the minor is a question of means of production, which is reflected in "aesthetic transformations" and "signature authorial practices, ways of inscribing desire" (414) through which the films texts "achieve collective implications" (415). This material and aesthetic understanding of the minor is productive to think of cinematic practices that have to make-do in the context of Quebec's circuits of film production, distribution, and exhibition.

Beyond gender and sexuality, the term "minor cinema" broadly refers to filmmaking practices that destabilize hegemonic systems and representations of cultural and national identity. Mette Hjort emphasizes how "minor" describes the limitations placed upon creative work due to geo-political and cultural restraints and the relationship to national formations of cultural identity through cinema. She writes, "The term minor points, then, to the existence of regimes of cultural power and to the need for strategic resourcefulness on the part of those who are unfavourably situated within the cultural landscape in question, be it a national context or a more properly global one." (Hjort, 2005, p. ix). Against a vague definition of "minor cinema" as something

“small and somehow insurgent” (White 2018, 357), Jerry White proposes a more specifically geopolitical definition of minor cinema that “privileges relatively discrete national or cultural formations” (358). White applies “minor cinema” to cultural cinematic formations within nation-states that trouble well-defined understandings of national(ist) culture and identity. For White, national cinema does not point to “‘films about insurgent nationalism’ or ‘films in small nation’s language’”; it is instead an “inclusive” term that points to a “nationalism that is inclusive precisely because it is territorial” (368). Therefore, he identifies four models of minor cinema: sub-national, sub-state, small countries, and Indigenous. Each acknowledges the actual existing borders of the nation, while gesturing towards the flexibility of cultural borders that cannot be conflated with the national and are always shaped by larger global/local influences.

Quebec cinema is, for Jerry White, exemplary of a geopolitical minor form of cinema. Quebec can be described as a “sub-state” cinema as far as it is the “repository of a *national* identity” with a “sustained tradition of filmmaking across many forms” (365). White proposes an understanding of Quebec as minor cinema in national terms because it is a cinema that constructs a national imaginary, without necessarily pushing for a concrete political project of nation-state formation. Quebec is well anchored in a territory defined by material infrastructures of cinema production, without thematically or stylistically reifying nor essentializing links between territory, language, and culture. Instead, according to White, Quebec “sub-state” national cinema deals with issues that are linked to the territory, independently of the language used in the diegesis of the film and of a nationalist project, and touches on distinct, locally situated, socio-historical and cultural conditions. In this respect, White’s proposed model of Quebec national cinema as minor cinema is pretty open and pluralistic and allows for an inclusion of films made within the infrastructures of Quebec cinema by immigrant filmmakers that do not inevitably embrace dominant, official and hegemonic, discourses of interculturalism (nor of multiculturalism). Yet, the films are very well anchored in the Quebec territory, diegetically, and focus on immigrant characters based in Quebec and the cultural-political specificity of the immigrant experience in this state, while also addressing transnational diasporic communities. Moreover, these films all invoke a Quebec cinematic tradition both in terms of imaginary, actors, infrastructures, and in particular deconstructing the “representation” of immigrant women who articulate the material dimensions of gender and ethnicity and class. White also discusses how “diaspora cinemas “pose a challenge” to his own four-partite model of the types of minor cinema

as far as they develop outside of a determined nation-state and address the cultural consciousness of a people dispersed in different places.²² In this respect, the examples of diasporic filmmaking practices examined in this chapter are quite original: while they address diasporic communities, they do not thematize a national cultural project of the homeland, and focus instead on the presence of the diasporic peoples in the host society (Quebec).²³

In the context of a post-colonial world and globalization, where clear-cut binary distinctions between dominant and oppositional become difficult to grasp, Deleuze and Guattari's elusive definition of "minor" becomes especially relevant. Reworking this concept, Lionnet and Shih propose "minor transnationalism" as a term that captures "the creative interventions that networks of minoritized cultures produce within and across national borders" (2005, 7). This framework, in other words, takes into account how minorities, or better, minoritized people,²⁴ within a given national formation, engage with major (that is dominant, hegemonic) culture without necessarily openly resisting and countering it, but instead rearranging it, while inventing minor-to-minor "micropractices of transnationality" that redefine national and ethnic boundaries. In stressing "horizontal" (2005, 11) relationships among various manifestations of minor practices, Lionnet and Shih's concept of minor transnationalism allows for an understanding of minor cinema as the production, aesthetics, and politics of diasporic filmmakers that engage with the national cinematic tradition of their host society (the majoritarian language), but also with cinematic conventions from "home" as well as global diasporic cinemas.

Minor transnationalism is an heuristic framework that allows me to put in conversation diasporic women filmmakers that, across various modes of production, expand national boundaries and articulate gender issues from a cultural distinct perspective within the local scale of Quebec cinema, addressing global economic and political forces, and staging postcolonial intercultural encounters. These works engage with several filmmaking traditions that are considered minor, from Quebec national cinema itself, to Third Cinema, to women's cinema, and

²² White takes as example Yiddish cinema.

²³ Andersson and Sundholm's very recent contribution to the debates of minor cinema further revisits the implications of this term in relation to migrant cinemas, moving away from an understanding of minor in aesthetic terms as it was used by Hamid Naficy to his formulation of accented cinema, to focus instead on the modes of production of filmmakers and films "in the margins" (2023, 25-27).

²⁴ Robert Stam has explained that the word minority "naturalizes what is historically produced and ideologically constructed through a project which constructs some groups as "major" and others as "minor"" (Stam, 2019, 244). The term "minoritarian" instead "calls attention to the manufactured aspect of "minorities" (idem).

accented cinema. For example, Gentille M. Assih, who belongs to a new generation of documentary filmmakers from Africa, who take on from their predecessors an interest in addressing issues of migration from contemporary perspective and concerns, contributes to the documentary tradition of women's cinema at the National Film Board. Hejer Charf, instead, combines post-third-worldist cinematic aesthetics and the *cinéma-verité* approaches. Zéhil's films are in conversation with a Quebec's tradition of women's cinema that has foregrounded female protagonists, their relations to the urban space of Montreal, their perspectives on gendered relations within the nation, and their feelings of exile. Yet, Zéhil's films belong to a transnational imaginary created by female Lebanese filmmakers who have worked within francophone circuits of production and distribution. The work of the filmmakers Charf, Assih, and Zéhil is situated outside the major transnational circuits within which Quebec cinema travels, thus occupying a minor position both within the circuits of distribution in Quebec, but also vis-à-vis the mechanisms that have allowed Quebec cinema to move from a "peripheralized" position in world cinema (Marshall 2010). Coming from France's ex-colonies and established in Quebec, these filmmakers and their films move across and create a "relationship between different margins" (Lionnet and Shi 2005, 2). Through an analysis of the position of Assih, Charf, and Zéhil within the film industry in Quebec and their approaches to filmmaking, I explore how and to what (limited extent) their minor cinema engages with the major circuits of production and distribution of Quebec, but also how the minor-minor connections between women's cinema and diasporic cinema enables a reimagining of the configurations of gender, ethnic identity, and space in Quebec cinema.²⁵

Assih's, Charf's, and Zéhil's films circulate and respond to mechanisms of circulation within the *francosphere*. As a transnational francophone generation of filmmakers, Assih, Charf, and Zéhil benefit from the formal or informal "material structures of opportunities" (McHugh 2009, 127) that enable cinematic circuits of production and distribution in which France remain a node of passage either in terms of film training or of film distribution. Maryanne Zéhil, born in Beirut, acquired professional experience working as a journalist between Lebanon and France

²⁵ Khoo has also applied minor transnationalism in terms of circulation, starting from an understanding of the concept as not only defining "minority cultural articulations with a majority culture", but also "encompassing minor-to-minor articulations within and across national borders" (2014, 41). Khoo has applied the concept of minor transnationalism to women's filmmaking within queer Asian cinema (40), with a particular focus on short films, stressing that "queer Asian cinema produced by women filmmakers is the category most routinely excluded from the feature film and auteurist terrain of major international film festivals" (2014, 41).

before moving to Quebec, while Charf's films receive consistent and noticeable exhibition especially in *art et essai* theaters in Paris. In terms of profiting from the framework of la *f/Francophonie* for the advancement of her filmmaking career, Assih's trajectory is the most interesting. Born in Togo, Gentile M. Assih is part of a generation of African filmmakers that took advantage of transnational francophone infrastructures to aid their documentary practice, such as educational exchange programs prominently between France and African countries, and forums of circulation and exhibition for their films thanks to the endorsement of film festivals (Tcheuyap 2023). In the case of Assih, specifically, crucial has been her film training through the network Africadoc of the French documentary school of Ardèche Images, and the circulation of her first films at FESPACO.²⁶ Thanks to this training she could realize her first documentary films, *Itchombi* (2009) and *La rite, la folle et moi* (2012), both produced by Ardèche Images Production. Assih herself has recognized the value of the infrastructure of Francophonie. In her development as a cinephile, the films she could access to growing up came from this specific geo-cultural area (Assih 2022). It also enabled her access to filmmaking:

Dans les années 2000 il y a eu plein de programmes, qui n'existaient pas avant, en lien avec le système de la Francophonie, pour former des cinéastes africains. Je fais partie de ce group de « jeunes » qui ont pu suivre ces formations. Pendant une période de trois ans, on a fait nos formations, pis on était tout le temps dans les mêmes festivals avec nos projets ou

²⁶ Ardèches Images is a French organization founded in 1979 and devoted to the development and promotion of documentary film culture. Within this organisation, *l'École documentaire* (the Documentary School) was started in 1997 with writing residences and with the larger aim to help emergent filmmakers in producing their first film (Ardèches Images, L'Association). In 2002, Ardèches Images founded Africadoc, a network of associations, initially spanning across francophone Africa, dedicated to provide trainings and support to young filmmakers. Since 2012, Afridoc has expanded across Africa under the umbrella of Docmonde, a larger organization that "supports documentary filmmakers at every stage: writing, finding producers and distribution [...] in 6 regions of the world: Africa, Eurasia, South-East Asia, Amazonia-Caribbean zone, Pacific zone, Indian Ocean" (Docmonde, Home). Originally put in place with the support of the UNESCO, with the objective of "negotiating co-productions, purchases and financial support which will contribute to the survival and development of a documentary representation of African realities by African authors-directors and their independent producers" (UNESCO, "Launching Africadoc" 2004), the program Africadoc has often been accused of neo-colonialism and of training African filmmakers within pre-formatted approaches to documentary filmmakers. Yet, in this respect, Assih has asserted the creative autonomy of the filmmakers and producers trained within the Africadoc programs, saying: "Africadoc est un cadre. Une fois outillés, nous sommes assez intelligents pour savoir ce qui est bien pour nous ou pas. Africadoc ne nous impose rien. Quand je présente mon film dans un festival, ce que je dis n'engage que moi. Quand le film est primé, c'est grâce à sa qualité, pas au programme. Le public juge le film et non la personne qui initie le programme. Personne ne fait nos films à notre place." (Barlet 2010). The FESPACO is the Panafrican Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou, first created in 1969 with the name of "Semaine du cinéma africain," and held biannually since 1996. It represents a crucial hub for the showcase as well as for production and distribution deals of African cinema.

nos réalisations. Donc, on était comme un groupe solidaire de jeunes cinéastes. (Assih, 2022)²⁷

Additionally, Assih completed a Master's in Film Production at UQAM, after arriving in Quebec in 2009, which was determined by her personal migratory trajectory.

Assih, Charf, and Zéhil have struggled, and partially still struggle, to find their place and have their work funded or distributed by the cinematic institutions in Quebec. For that reason, they all founded their own production companies. For Charf and Zéhil it was a strategy of professional affirmation, and for Assih, a more explicit cultural-political intervention. Hejer Charf is culturally situated in Montreal within the new Arabic diaspora and frequently collaborates with poet Nadine Ltaif. Yet, she always had to ingeniously make do to establish herself as a filmmaker in Quebec media industry. Charf produces her films through Nadja Productions, a company she founded in 1996, and incorporated in 2001.²⁸ She is also supported by the NFB-sponsored program "Aide au Cinema Independant du Canada."²⁹ Yet, Charf mostly relies on private investors to sustain her company and her filmmaking, since she never received funding from federal or provincial agencies. Charf frames the funding of her company as a creative choice:

J'ai fondé Nadja Productions car je ne voulais pas attendre pendant des années, l'accord d'un producteur ou d'un financeur pour faire un film. J'aime travailler d'une façon constante et être libre de faire les films que je veux, comme je veux. J'aime travailler d'une

²⁷ "In the 2000s, several programs, which didn't exist before, started to be targeted to African filmmakers within the system of Francophonie. I am part of these generation of young filmmakers that could attend these training programs. For three years, we followed these training, and then we were always in the same festivals with our films. So, we were like a solidary group of young filmmakers" (Author's translation).

²⁸ With this company, Charf has also produced Anna Karina's film *Victoria* and the concerts of the french actress in Quebec with Philippe Katherine.

²⁹ This program funded in 1973 to support "artisanal cinema" is specifically addressed to francophone filmmakers across Canada. This program provides equipment to independent filmmakers working in animation and experimental short films, as well as short and long feature documentaries. According to the NFB description of the program: "Il s'agit d'ouvrir les portes de l'ONF et d'offrir l'accès aux services techniques à tous ces cinéastes qui suivent une démarche personnelle, singulière et qui portent des films à haut risque explorant les limites de l'écriture cinématographique. Des créateurs et créatrices qui ont souvent en commun une approche artisanale, la précarité des moyens et un financement restreint" (NFB 2017, 4). The mandate of the program is thus to help independent filmmakers respecting the artisanal dimension and spirit of collaboration that brought about innovative cinematographic approaches to filmmaking in Quebec cinema. The program provides access to the means of filmic production by making film technologies available at the NFB. Indeed, the program does not give actual monetary aid, but only access to labs for image and sound post-production. The program has a peculiar linguistic politics: it can support the making of films in any language except English, and opening, closing titles, and subtitles must be in French. Only Canadian citizens or permanent residents can apply to this program.

façon artisanale, fabriquer un film avec mes mains, en petit comité. Depuis 25 ans, je travaille avec la poète Nadine Ltaif. Nous sommes un binôme professionnel et créatif très soudé. Pour le moment, la compagnie produit exclusivement mes projets. (Carrier, “Entretien: Hejer Charf”)

Maryanne Zéhil only recently received recognition and support from Quebec institutions. Her professional journey has been torturous. During our February 2022 interview, Zéhil explained how she decided to found her own production company, Mia Productions, in 2000 after receiving several refusals from local production companies who were not interested in her perspective. While this on the one hand corresponds to a strategy of professional agency, on the other, it confirms her marginality in the specific context of Quebec film industry. By producing her films with her own production company, Zéhil had the space to express intercultural encounters in Quebec and exercise complete control over her films. As stated on her website, Mia Productions’ main objective is “to produce high quality and powerful stories through thought-provoking subjects. Its priority is to build bridges between different cultures” (Mia Productions, “About”). Zéhil sees her jobs as a screenwriter, film director, and producer in Quebec as complementary:

Donc la nécessité était là pour me pousser à prendre les rênes de la productions [...] Maintenant mon troisième métier de productrice je l’aime autant que les autres parce que c’est un besoin aussi de qui je suis. Et j’aime passer de l’un à l’autre, c’est à dire quand je suis dans un impasse créatif, je passe à quelque chose de plus concret qui est la production. Ça me nourrit, ça me permet de prendre du recul, quand je reviens au créatif. Donc, c’est fantastique. Moi je me complète avec ces trois métiers, vous m’enlèverez un, je serais très malheureuse, peut-être je n’arriverais pas à faire les deux autres. (Zéhil, Interview with author 2022)³⁰

Finally, Gentille M. Assih has mostly been working as an executive producer for several media companies, a condition both determined by her migrant status, which requires her having a stable job, and by a strategic choice that reinforces her position within an unwelcoming media industry environment for an African woman. While Assih directed her first documentary in Quebec, *Sortir de l’ombre* (2019), at the National Film Board, she recently decided to establish, in 2020, her

³⁰“By necessity, I also started to work as a producer. Now, it’s my third job and I like it as much as the two others [screenwriting and directing] because it is part of me. And I like to swing from one job to the other: when I find myself blocked at the creative level, I do something more concrete which is production. It nourishes me, it allows me to step back once I go back to the creative aspects. So, it’s amazing! I fulfill myself with these three jobs, if you took one of them away from me, I would be unhappy and maybe unable to do the other two.” (Author’s translation).

own media production company—Productions Colorée Inc. During our interview, Assih explained that with her company, she hopes to provide support to new immigrant creators within a larger media industry environment that, as she herself experienced, can be condescending towards Black filmmakers.

(Cinematic) Interculturalism in Quebec

The films of Assih, Charf and Zéhil are examples of minor transnationalism not just because they are situated within “the interstices of social formations and cinematic practices” (Naficy 2001, 10), but because their films open up a space to reimagine dominant francophone liberal feminist discourses. They foreground their positions as diasporic subjects and the transnational histories and gendered issues of migration and diaspora, even when the filmmakers not always situate their practice and work within an explicit feminist framework. Their filmmaking approaches respond, implicitly or explicitly, to the federal and provincial debates around “multiculturalism” and “interculturalism” in Canada and Quebec.

While “intercultural” and “multicultural” cinema has been theorized within film studies, my concern is with how these terms reflect the different political and governmental discourses about the cultural integration of immigrants in Canada and in Quebec. While “intercultural” was Quebec’s response to Canadian federal policies of “multiculturalism,” both represent discursive practices that have material effects on the management of racial, cultural, and ethnic difference in the project of building national belonging through formal citizenship. Originally presented in 1971 by Pierre Trudeau’s Liberal government and adopted into law in 1988, the Multicultural Act was a policy that recognized Canadians’ diverse cultural backgrounds within a bilingual framework.³¹ Developed to manage Quebec nationalism and the influx of non-European immigrants in the late 1960s, the Trudeau’s policy officially enshrined that each cultural group in Canada retains a distinct identity that contributes to the nation as a whole, and that English and French remain the only official languages (Antonius, Labelle and Rocher 2013).³² Internationally

³¹ In 1971, the Multiculturalism Policy of Canada was adopted. In 1982, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom was promulgated. In 1985, the Broadcasting Policy Reflecting Canada’s Linguistic and Cultural Diversity was introduced, which regulated how the broadcasting media should reflect Canadian cultural diversity. The Multiculturalism Act was implemented in 1988.

³² These waves of immigration dismantled the self-perception of Canada as essentially of white, European descendent. This self-perception is even more acute in the case of Quebec where the Francophone population perceived themselves as “autochtones,” completely disregarding their role in settler colonialism and the Indigenous populations.

regarded as one of the most successful policies of immigration and cultural diversity, Canadian state's sanctioned definition of multiculturalism has its critics. Antiracist feminist sociologist Himani Bannerji characterizes multiculturalism as "a central pillar of Canadian ideological state apparatus" (1996, 109), and is deployed as an instrument to neutralize difference. By putting emphasis on cultural difference, it sidesteps structural differences of class, gender, and race (1996, 109). Scholar Beenash Jafri has further stressed that multiculturalism is based on an essentialist understanding of culture and focuses on expression of culture, instead of addressing unequal access to resources and opportunities among different cultural communities (2012; 2020, 112). In this respect, multiculturalism becomes a mechanism that constructs difference by centering whiteness as the core of "Canadianess," against which "diversity" is confronted. Jafri specifically addresses how multiculturalism promotes the recognition of cultural difference at the cost of Indigenous sovereignty. It does not put into question settler state and relation to the land (2020, 118). For this reason, multiculturalism is as an ideological form of management: by promising inclusion, it expects non-white, racialized people, to align with settler power.

Public opinion in Quebec has often criticized multiculturalism because it diminishes the specificity of francophone culture and language as just another ethnic group in Canada. Hence, while larger critiques to multiculturalism stress the fact that it elides historical inequalities of the various racialized groups constituting the social tissue of Canada, that it reifies cultural groups as internally homogenous, and that it essentializes cultures as fixed unities, failing to take into account hybridity, the critiques moved by Quebec public opinion are based on the idea that the multicultural policy does not recognize the dual French-English nature of Canadian culture. Quebec public opinion is worried that by not recognizing French as one of the founding cultures of Canada, French culture and language will be assimilated by Anglo-American culture. In response to Quebec's view on the shortcomings of multiculturalism, the provincial government has elaborated and promoted the discourse of interculturalism. It was implemented, at the turn of the twenty-first century, when new non-European migration was perceived as a further threat to the preservation of the French language. Interculturalism in Quebec, unlike the federal Multicultural Act, is not a policy but a discourse, developed since the 1980s, that promotes the integration of immigrants through the promotion of a common culture, assured by the protection of the French language, and the promotion of a sense of belonging to the Quebec nation

(Bouchard and Taylor 2008; Bouchard 2015; Fourot 2015).³³ Central to this definition of interculturalism remains the idea of Quebec as a minority francophone nation that must be preserved. Contrary to multiculturalism, that supposedly puts all cultures on equal footing, interculturalism proclaims that French-Canadian culture is the majoritarian culture that must serve as reference to which immigrant must comply and be integrated. In this respect, central to interculturalism is the understanding of the French language as the common language of public life that, on the one hand, must be preserved against cultural fragmentation and assimilation, and that, on the other, must facilitate the connections among diverse cultures in the host society (Fourot 2015). Moreover, writes Gérard Bouchard, one of the major ideologues and advocates of interculturalism: “l’interculturalisme présuppose le développement d’un sentiment d’appartenance (prioritaire ou non) à cette nation [le Québec]” (quoted in Fourot 2015, 168).³⁴ In this respect, quite explicit in the formulation of interculturalism, the Quebec “nation” “serves as the dominant social context into which migrants must integrate” (Blad and Couton 2009). At the same time, the prefix “inter” aims to stress the connectedness among the cultures and the reciprocal influence that, eventually, they can have on each other. Interculturalism is, thus, proposed as a model “that advocates harmonious relations between cultures based on intensive exchanges centred on an integration process that does not seek to eliminate differences while fostering the development of a common identity” (Bouchard-Taylor 2008, 287). Quebec’s intercultural model is based on the constant negotiation of difference and respect between a majoritarian francophone culture and minority cultures. Yet, this model never questions the condition of existence of the Quebec nation itself, built through the infrastructures of settler colonialism.

Interculturalism provided a blueprint to the development of a society that encourages integration of all citizens to a dominant national culture. It responded to increasing immigration from Africa, the Middle East, and Central and South America since the 1980s (Blad and Couton

³³ To date, there are no official policy or law regarding interculturalism. The most official document providing a definition of interculturalism as an approach to immigration is the Bouchard-Taylor Commission report on Reasonable Accommodation (2007-2008). Bill 101, *Charte de la langue française* (Charter of the French Language), which in 1977 established French as the official language of the Government and courts of Quebec, remains the major reference for the intercultural approach.

³⁴ “Interculturalism entails the development of a feeling of belonging to the [Quebec] nation” (author’s translation). The actualization of interculturalism is promoted through so-called “reasonable accommodation,” a vague term that indicates that cultural practices, mostly religious one, of Canadian citizens are accommodated. The controversy around reasonable accommodations in Quebec is hotly debated. Feminist sociologist Sirma Bilge has analysed how this controversy is constructed as “raceless,” but it actually hides “racialized power dynamics” (2013, 158).

2009). These immigration waves and intercultural themes have been portrayed and examined in Quebec cinema, according to Bachand (2013). While Quebec cinema has variously tackled “cultural encounters” throughout its history,³⁵ since the 1980s a corpus of films portray “otherness” and pluralism, integration, and cohabitation of diverse cultures in Quebec which counters the *pure laine* construction of Quebec identity. These earlier films addressed the question of the “immigrant other” (Marshall 2001, 263–84), but mostly focused on the experience of European migration. In the last twenty years, that has changed. Since the 2000s, the film industry began to address other migrant communities and reflect more specifically the debates on interculturalism and the assumption of a Quebec society as inherently white and francophone.³⁶ Bachand concludes with an analysis of Denis Chouinard’s *Tar Angel* (2001), a film that crucially centered the experience of an immigrant Arab family living in Quebec at the turn of the millenium. Since *Tar Angel*, interculturalism has progressively been reflected in cultural production at large. According to Bachand, in the last twenty years in Quebec cinema, the representation of “intercultural encounters” arose as a motif, intertwined with the “father-son” relationship (2009). For Bachand, the intertwining of these motifs is indicative of a new turn in Quebec cinema that portrays pluralist and anti-essentialist constructions of identities.³⁷ Quebec studies scholar Milena Santoro argues that Quebec films from the 2000s depict Quebec as having the trait of “Américanité”: constant contact among diverse cultures is a fundamental experience in the American societies (100). Santoro distinguishes between a *cinéma d’immigration* from a *cinéma d’immigré*, the first referring to films on immigrants, and the second to films by immigrant filmmakers. While both “révèlent l’inspiration durable du rêve américain, tout en soulignant les problèmes entraînés par la diversité croissante qui continue de transformer le paysage et la société urbains du Québec” (114), the *cinéma d’immigré* offers “des portraits plus

³⁵ Historically extensive, Bachand’s review signals two cornerstones of *cinéma-verité*, *À tout prendre* (Claude Jutra 1963) and *Le chat dans le sac* (Gilles Groulx 1964), as emblematic of Quebec cinema’s modernity and constant reflection of Quebec’s complex identity (Bachand 2013).

³⁶ A previous cohort of filmmakers that has tackled immigrant issues include Marilú Maillet, Tahani Rached, Paul Tana, Léa Pool, who were active across various cinematic circuits (the NFB, the independent sector, and the commercial one) and modes of production (fiction, experimental, auteur cinema). Santoro argues that “une masse critique de films qui explorent le thème et l’expérience de l’immigration a émergé au Québec à partir des années 1980” (a critical corpus of films that explore the theme and the experience of immigration emerged in Quebec since the 1980s) especially thanks to the work of the mentioned immigrant filmmakers, who center in their films immigrant histories (2015, 104).

³⁷ Bachand’s analysis focuses on two films from 2004, *Memoires affectives* (Francis Leclerc) and *Littoral* (Waydi Mouwad) that question fixed ethnocentric notions of Quebec identity and culture through the personal quest of male protagonists and their relationship with their fathers, which is symptomatic of a larger collective identitarian quest.

nuancés de l'expérience de l'exil, de la différence culturelle et de l'intégration parfois frustrée ou problématique à la société d'accueil" (2015, 111).³⁸ In a more recent article (2021), Beatrice Guenther considers how cinematic reflections and discourses on interculturalism have reflected changing attitudes toward immigration since François Legault and the nationalist and conservative party CAQ was voted into power in 2018 (Guenther 2021, 125). Legault's government has promoted new strict immigration policies cutting the number of immigrants by 20% in 2019 and passing, in the same year, Bill 21, *Loi sur la laïcité de l'État* (Act respecting the laicity of the State), which prohibits the wearing of religious symbols in the public sector (Guenther 2021, 125). Within this context, Guenther argues that the films by Algerian-born Bachir Bensaddek and of Lebanese-descendent Raed Hammoud "provide cinematic strategies to shape perceptions of migration that counter stereotyping" (126) by focusing on the experiences of immigrants from Maghreb and the Middle-East to Quebec, their split identity between home and host society, and their "cross-community connections not necessarily based solely on shared ethnic or national identity."³⁹

The literature on Quebec intercultural cinema, briefly illustrated above, has mostly taken a textual and representational approach to examine and challenge dominant and fixed notions of Quebecois identity.⁴⁰ It has not focused on the gendered experiences of immigration in Quebec, nor the work of immigrant female filmmakers that have established their practice in Quebec.⁴¹ To address this gap, in the following sections, I illustrate how Assih's, Charf's, and Zehil's work reflects on the impact of migration and displacement on individuals and the host society, contributes to the specificity of discourses on interculturalism in Quebec, and expands dominant configurations of gender, race, and ethnicity.

³⁸While both "demonstrate the persistence of the American dream and bring forward new problems arising from cultural diversity that keep transforming Quebec society and urban landscape" (114), the *cinéma d'immigré* usually offers "more nuanced portraits of the experience of the exile, of cultural difference, and the sometimes thwarted integration into the host society." (Author's translation).

³⁹ The film analysed by Guenther are *Montréal la Blanche* (Bachir Bensaddek, 2016) and Raed Hammoud's *T'es où Youssef* (2017) and *Les Poussieres de Daech* (2020).

⁴⁰ Furthermore, it must be noticed, that studies of Quebec cinema have not integrated the concept of "intercultural cinema," theorized by Laura Marks as "experimental styles that attempt to represent the experience of living between two or more cultural regimes of knowledge, or living as a minority in the still majority white, Euro-American West," (2000, 1) and more recently re-elaborated by Lúcia Nagib and Anne Jerslev as an approach that "exemplifies how culture and cultural products are always the result of struggles, negotiations and productive interactions between different systems, practices and interest" (2014, 7).

⁴¹ A notable exception, however, is Virginie Mesana's research on Eisha Marjara as representative of multicultural female filmmakers working in Quebec since the 1990s. Mesana proposes an analysis of the Marjara's NFB-produced documentary *Desperately Seeking Helen* (1998) addressing in particular how the film imagines diasporic social relations within the host society (2014).

Gentile M. Assih: Documenting Intimacy of the Migration Process

As a filmmaker from the African diaspora, it is useful to situate Gentile M. Assih both within the African documentary tradition and in relation to contemporary transnational African women filmmakers. Compared to fictional filmmaking, documentary film developed relatively late within Francophone Africa since decolonization in the 1960s (Ricci 2018; Gabara 2019; Tcheuyap 2023).⁴² Rachel Gabara distinguished between a first generation of West and Central Africa documentary filmmakers active from the 1960s through the 1980s, and a new generation that emerged since the 1990s.⁴³ The first generation followed the pioneering work of Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, and countered dominant colonial imaginary through an “autoethnographic” approach “in which footage of rituals, customs, and traditional occupations was accompanied with an authoritative, explanatory voice-over” (2019, 364). Building on the work of their predecessors, this second generation of African documentary filmmakers “have mixed documentary and fictional modes in their representations of African social and political histories and realities but have rejected autoethnography in favour of experimental films that foreground first-person narrative strategies” (365).⁴⁴ At the turn of the century, according to Alexie Tcheuyap, documentary filmmaking has increasingly become more accessible thanks to new technologies, the proliferation of new funding systems, and the training program Africadoc (2023, 34). Melissa Thackway had described the trends within contemporary Sub-Saharan francophone African filmmaking. There is a continued interest for oral storytelling and a “committed socially responsible approach to filmmaking” (2014, 8) inherited from previous generations aimed at addressing “questions of representation, of redefining one’s identity, and of portraying one’s realities” (9). The films of this last generation of filmmakers offer, Thackway writes, “striking questions and representations of the frontier and its corollaries: itinerancy, migration, circulation, de- and reterritorialization. Exploring actual journeys, crossings, displacements, and exile, these filmic journeys are symbolic of quests for identities [...]” (2019,

⁴² After decolonization, the new governments established a series of incentives to encourage a cinematic production that would counter colonial stereotyping in the objectifying tradition of the ethnographic film and of “cinema of exploration.” This last term points to a tradition of European filmmaking that used photography and film at the service of the colonial’s mandate of the civilizing mission (Gabara 2019).

⁴³ Relevant filmmakers of this first generation are, for example Moïse Zé, who made *The Mvet* in 1965, and Safi Faye, director of *Kaddu Beykat* (1975) and *Fad’jal* (1979). Vieyra is mostly known for *Afrique-sur-Seine* (1955), shot in Paris, but his most cited documentaries are *A Nation is born* (1961) and *Lamb* (1963) (Garbara 2019).

⁴⁴ Some of the filmmakers of this generation are Jean-Marie Teno (*Africa, I will flee you*, 1992), Mahamat Saleh Haroun (*Bye Bye Africa* 1998), and Aberrahmane Sissako (*Life on Earth*, 1998).

445).⁴⁵ In this relatively new explosion of documentary filmmaking in and from Africa, women filmmakers have played a central role. Beti Ellerson notes, “les femmes africaines dominent dans ce genre [le documentaire], peut-être simplement parce qu’elles ont un intérêt particulier pour les questions pressantes de leurs sociétés, pour raconter des histoires qui autrement ne seraient pas racontées” (2015, 115).⁴⁶

Assih’s approach to filmmaking fits within an existing practice of African women documentary filmmaking identified by Beti Ellerson. In her overview of the African women documentary filmmakers active since the 1980s mostly working in transnational contexts, she aims to bring academic attention to largely overlooked African film cultures. According to Ellerson: “African women’s documentary work is increasingly visible on the international film festival circuit and cultural venues worldwide [...] the predominance of documentary work by African women makers is evidence of their significant contribution to this genre” (224).⁴⁷ These filmmakers, Ellerson argues, have unifying themes and formal elements that unite them as one corpus of study (2016). Ellerson writes:

“The practice of storytelling, of relating actuality, the real, of recounting history, the personal, the social, the political, are all features of the screen culture in which African women have evolved in myriad ways as stakeholders in the cultural production of their society and world. Telling stories through documentary in particular has been a dominant mode among African women.” (Ellerson, 2016, 223)

In a subsequent article (2017), Ellerson further individuated a larger transnational cohort of African women filmmakers, including first- and second-generation immigrants, working across fiction and documentary filmmaking, that “are using cinema as a means to show the diverse realities of their society, the continent, the African world as a whole and their place within it” (273). As an immigrant in Quebec, Assih can be counted in larger cohort and their concerns with migration and diasporic identities.

⁴⁵ Thackway focuses in particular on three films: *Kinshasa Place* (Zeka Laplaine, 2006), *A Trip to the Country* (Jean Marie Teno, 2000), and *A Thousand Suns* (Mati Diop, 2013).

⁴⁶ “African women rule in the documentary genre, maybe simply because they are particularly interested in the pressing issues of their societies, in telling stories that wouldn’t be told otherwise.” (Author’s translation).

⁴⁷ In her overview, Ellerson individuates the following trends in African women filmmaking: “autobiographical, personal story, a recurrent them among African women living in the global African diaspora” (228) and “issues of identities articulated in corporeal and sartorial expression, particularly as it relates to hair, skin color, and the black female body” (232).

Assih belongs to the younger generation of African documentary filmmakers and took advantage of the new filmmaking opportunities within the Francophonie. Her work is engaged in preserving and transmitting African cultural heritage and incorporates traditional social practices and rituals. Assih documents the traditional ceremony of circumcision in *Itchcombi*, and the Akpéma in *La rite, la folle et moi*. She approaches these local ancestral traditions with a genuine curiosity, conceiving of her role as a cultural agent to instigate social change without condemnation. Assih combines an interest in storytelling and oral tradition with an ethnographic, yet not objectifying, gaze, framing these rites of passage and social practices in physical and metaphorical narratives of growth, and filming gestures, dances, and rituals that create a new visual repertory. Her films comprise of participatory cinema direct sequences, interrupted by oral tales told as conversations between characters, and contemplative long shots of the African landscape. While not informed by a feminist documentary tradition, Assih's films address issues of sexuality, of intergenerational trauma among women, and traditional gender roles and expectations.

In *Itchcombi* (2009), Assih combines an ethnographic approach and an interest for storytelling to examine the “itchcombi,” a ritual of circumcision that marks a crucial social passage for the men in the village of Sola in Togo. At the beginning of the film, the filmmaker in voice-over tells the legendary tale of how the ritual was brought to the village. These ancestral customs are the film's focus, which Assih approaches with respect, including negotiating permission to film with the people in the village. Assih follows Déou, a Togolese student in Dakar that returns to Sola, his native village, to go through the “itchombi.” After Déou requests the knife be disinfected with alcohol, the film focuses on the village's debates about updating the ritual. Thus, Assih does not take an objective standpoint, but rather depicts the ritual within an ethical framework. She acknowledges how the customs are central in young people's education, personal growth, and connection to local culture, and, at same time, calls for taking sanitary precautions against sexual transmitted diseases and HIV. During the interviews with the villagers and sequences depicting the ritual itself in great detail, the filmmaker does not erase her presence, but instead stresses her camera's intrusions. Her as a filmmaker is not a distant observer, but a participant aware that her presence might instigate social change. Indeed, at the end of the film, Assih's voice-over announces that since shooting the film, disinfecting the knife has become part of the ritual's tradition. Assih, during my interview, described her approach to documentary

filmmaking, beginning with *Itchombi*: “Je ne suis pas allée avec un regard de l’extérieur, d’un touriste, ou d’un Européen qui vient avec un jugement, mais je suis allée avec une curiosité. Ça c’est la base de mon travail, je ne vais pas pour dénoncer ou pour donner mon point de vue, je vais pour comprendre, je vais avec des questionnements.”⁴⁸

Assih’s dialectic approach to traditional rituals does not dismiss them as archaic or subjected to an objectifying gaze, but presents them as the result of negotiations and as central in sociability and personal growth. In a report on the “Afrique” section of the 2009 *États généraux du cinéma documentaire* (General State of Documentary Film) festival,⁴⁹ where *Itchombi* was presented, Olivier Barlet writes: “*Itchombi* atteint ainsi une double efficacité : faire évoluer une coutume particulière mais aussi rappeler que la tradition n’est qu’une série de modernités accumulées, qu’elle n’a rien de figé et qu’elle est le résultat des modifications que génèrent les conflits autour de sa propre fixation quand elle refuse d’évoluer.”⁵⁰ This approach is further developed in her second film *Le rite, la folle et moi* (2012).⁵¹ The documentary concerns *akpéma*, the initiation ritual for young women, where older women usher them into adulthood and married life. This time, Assih opts for a truly autoethnographic approach, and focuses the camera on herself and her own family. She films the process of mentoring her younger sister, transmitting to her a secret family history which Assih first heard during her own *akpéma*. The film alternates between showing various phases of the ritual, and conversations between Assih and her sister or her father. They reconstruct the story of her grandmother, falsely accused and repudiated for adultery, which indelibly left a mark of inter-generational violence on the family. Thus, through an intimate register, Assih not only reconciles her relationship to her father and consolidates her bond with her sister, but she also strengthens her female lineage in her family by disclosing the truth regarding her grandmother. Yet, Assih frames her film as personal and intimate and refuses to describe her approach as feminist. During my interview, the filmmaker thus commented on her approach in this film: “Ma démarche je ne la percevrait pas comme féministe parce que pour moi

⁴⁸ “I didn’t go as a gazing outsider, a tourist, or a European who comes to judge, but I went with curiosity. This is the baseline of my work, I don’t go with a denunciatory intent or to impose my perspective, I go there to understand, with questions” (Author’s translation).

⁴⁹ Ardèche Images organizes it every year since 1989.

⁵⁰ “The efficacy of *Itchombi* is thus twofold: it makes a specific use evolve, but it also reminds us that tradition is made up by a series of modernities piled up one after the other, that it is not fixed and that it is the result of changes raised from the debates around its stability when it refuses to evolve” (Author’s translation).

⁵¹ First presented at the États généraux du film documentaire in Lussas, France in 2012, this film later circulated at the Festival Cinémas d’Afrique in Lusanne, Suisse, where it received the Audience Award in 2013 and was presented in Montreal at the festival Vues d’Afrique.

c'était tout simplement un besoin de revendiquer les droits d'une femme qui n'a pas eu la chance de se défendre elle-même. Donc pour moi c'était important de dire, voici la vraie histoire: elle a été victime d'une injustice."⁵² Assih sees feminism as an external imposed framework, while, through her ethnographic attention to the phases, the gestures, and the details of the ritual, she clearly exposes the collective dimension and the female homosocial spaces of the *akpéma* as central in the formation of women.

Sortir de l'Ombre (2019), an NFB-produced feature documentary, is her first film in Canada. The film is a reflection on the gendered impacts of displacement, and she focuses on her own diasporic position, through her original documentary approach, based in intimate storytelling. Assih acknowledged the support she received at the NFB to develop her approach:

L'ONF était l'institution qui me permettait, qui me donnait le droit de commencer, oser, prendre une forme de parole et proposer une forme cinématographique, un modèle cinématographique qui n'est pas forcément classique... Donc l'ONF était l'institution qui pouvait me permettre de faire, d'essayer [...] Il y a fallu que je prouve que je connais mes classiques, je les ai appris avec Ardèche Images, puis je les ai réappris en faisant ma maîtrise, je connais tous les noms de cinéma, je connais cette base là, mais je veux me donner la chance de raconter quelque chose juste avec des mots des personnes, qui ont envie de les raconter et à leur façon parce que c'est ça mon approche. (Assih, 2022)⁵³

During my interview with her, Assih explained how valuable the NFB has been for her, second only to the training she received at UQAM. The NFB was a crucial to her efforts to establish herself professionally as a filmmaker in Quebec and Canada, following the process of adapting to her new country. The film began when she first met with Nathalie Cloutier, executive producer for the French Program Documentary Studio,⁵⁴ and they discussed their experiences as women

⁵² "I didn't see my approach as feminist because for me it was only about reclaiming the rights of a woman that didn't get a chance to defend herself. So, for me it was important to tell the true story: she was victim of injustice" (Author's translation).

⁵³ "The NFB was the institution that gave me the opportunity to start off, to dare, to speak up and to propose a cinematographic form, a filmic mode that is not necessarily classic... So the NFB was the institution that allowed me to make, to try out... I had to demonstrate that I know the established canon of documentary film, I learnt it at Ardèche Images, and I learnt them again during my master [at UQAM], I know all the important names in film history, I have that background, but I want to take the risk to tell something with the words of the people that want to tell [their experience] in their own way. This is my approach [to filmmaking]." (Author's translation)

⁵⁴ In this role Nathalie Cloutier has produced some of the most interesting documentaries at the NFB in the last 10 years, showing an interest for stories that are either transnational (in terms of narrative and mise-en-scene) and for filmmakers from migrant background (such as Zayne Akyol) (NFB, "Nathalie Cloutier). Some of the films produced

working in the film and media industry, and decided to collaborate. These interpersonal connections and friendships are central to Assih's creative process, and to the development of the film. In the film, she wanted to explore "cette réalité de femmes immigrantes comme moi qui doivent être femmes, mamans, épouses et, en plus, ont la difficulté d'être des immigrantes qui doivent gérer aussi toute la complexité de l'intégration quand on est en situation d'adaptation, [y compris] l'adaptation du couple, de la famille et tout" (Assih, 2022).⁵⁵ Therefore, during the preparatory research phase, she spoke to friends that similarly immigrated from Africa to Quebec, which helped her shape and establish the themes she explored.

Sortir de l'ombre reflects concern with domestic violence, following a tradition of NFB feminist documentaries that focuses on gendered power relations in the private sphere. Yet, unlike other NFB works, Assih's film concerns the experience and negotiations of female immigrants from Côte d'Ivoire in Quebec. Formally, it is far from both the modernist *En tant que femmes*, with cinema vérité and oneiric sequences, and the realism of anglophone documentaries.⁵⁶

The release of *Sortir de l'ombre* reflected both a superficial interest in "diversity" without addressing structural differences and the value of documentary as a tool for social change. The film was released online November 25, 2020, the international day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The NFB's press release demonstrated its promotion within a liberal multicultural framework:

This deeply moving documentary gives voice to inspiring Canadian women of African origin who regained control over their lives after suffering from domestic violence. The film celebrates their strength, helps us to understand the inherent challenges of immigration, and transcends cultural differences, while shedding light on a widespread phenomenon. (2020)

Yet, it had local distribution within women's shelters, which speaks to the NFB's long tradition of conceiving documentary filmmaking as a means of social change. Indeed, Assih herself as described the film as "a film outil pour des sensibilisations, des rencontres, visionnements à huit

by Cloutier are *Ken be la Until we win* (Will Prosper, 2019), *Wakeskun* (Steve Patry, 2016), and *Amina* (Sophie Deraspe, 2015).

⁵⁵ "The reality of immigrant women like me, who have to be women, mothers and spouses, on top of being immigrants who have to deal with the complexity of integration when they are in a process of adaptation, including the adaptation of the couple, of family, and so on" (Author's translation).

⁵⁶ The realist documentary feminist tradition at the NFB is represented, in particular, by the films produced within Studio D, "one of the first publicly funded feminist film-production unit in the world" established by Kathleen Shannon in 1974 (NFB, "Studio D").

clos avec des institutions spécialisées: les maisons d'hébergement, des groupes de personnes de services sociaux, associations de femmes victimes de violence conjugale.”⁵⁷

The film addresses the issue of domestic violence, without victimizing the women, who from their subject position tell their story of growth, self-affirmation, and strength. While the focus is on Christiane, a professor of French, the film avoids an individualist approach, instead situating Christiane within her support network of other immigrant women from the African diaspora, including Aissata, who also shares her experience of domestic violence. The film also follows the everyday life of Chouchou and her husband, a young couple who recently moved to Canada, which underscores the difficult process of adaptation in the new society. Among these women, the filmmaker situates herself as a friend, privileging an intimate approach to her subject while maintaining a respectful distance as a facilitator. The cinematography alternates between medium shots taken from an observational distance, and close-ups on small objects or gesture. The close-ups bring the audience into emotional proximity without creating paternalizing empathy. The film mostly takes place in interior, domestic spaces, showing the women doing chores and tasks, with particular attention given to the women's self-care beauty routines. The explanatory sequences are not staged as frontal interviews, but as friendly conversations. These familiar, domestic spaces are contrasted with the public spaces of women's and immigration organizations, where the women go to find collective solutions to the issue of domestic violence.

One particular sequence in the first half of the film illustrates the intimate process of adaptation to a new society in the everyday life experiences of immigrant women. In the sequence, Christiane and Aissata choose between cotton fabrics with flamboyant colours and patterns that could be seen as too brightly coloured for Montreal (Fig. 7). Then, they go to a grocery store, where they find some products “from back home” (Fig. 8). The sequence demonstrates both their negotiations of different beauty and fashion standards, and their alimentary acts of self-care, among friends that share the experience of displacement. The film articulates the gender-specific experience of immigration through a micro attention to the intimate that is inseparable from transnational mechanisms of migration. The sequence is also emblematic of Assih's participatory documentary approach. The audience hears her voice behind the camera, involved in these every-day life moments within this network of diasporic female

⁵⁷ “An instrumental tool to raise awareness, to meet up, in screenings behind closed doors within specialized institutions: shelters, groups of social services, women's organizations against domestic violence” (Author's translation).

friendship. Thus, the film not only brings forward the dynamics of diaspora with a focus on the gendered power relations that accompany the process of settlement in the host society, but also displays a commitment to the politics of gender, difference, and solidarity.

By addressing the diaspora of African women in Quebec, Assih makes a minor transnational intervention within the NFB. She privileges a perspective that does not focus on the process of migration, on the reasons why the subjects in her film left, but rather on the, possibly even more difficult, processes of settlement and adaptation. By doing so, she does, on the one hand, respond to a larger multicultural framework embedded within the recent mandate of the NFB, and, on the other, expands normative dominant understanding of what constitutes francophone culture in Quebec and in Canada through the experiences of African women.



Figure 7 *Sortir de l'ombre*. Screenshot



Figure 8 *Sortir de l'ombre*. Screenshot

Hejer Charf: Rewriting *Cinema-vérité* Fictions

On April 18, 2023, while I was writing this chapter, Hejer Charf, a Tunisian-born filmmaker, and

her long-term collaborator Nadine Ltaif, a Lebanese-born poet,⁵⁸ invited me to a private screening of Charf's most recent film, *(A)nnées en Parenthèse 2020–2022*, at the NFB's theatre in Montreal. The film weaves together disparate audio-visual clips to make sense of the crucial historical events occurred during the years of the pandemic, as explained by the director (Hejer Charf Nadja Productions, "Années en Parenthèse"). To make this film, Charf asked her friends around the world, situated in North Africa and the Middle East, North America, and France, to send her fragments of videos, voice-overs, and still images that would represent their personal response to the pandemic. In the film, these personal fragments are interwoven with clips and photos depicting public events taking place in the same years of the pandemic, such as the protests in Montreal for Black Lives Matter (June 2020) and Idle No More, following the death of Joyce Echaquan (September 2020); the protests in Tunisia (July 2021) and Lebanon, following an explosion in the port of Beirut (2020); and the deaths of leftist, anti-colonial filmmakers, such as Moufida Tatli and the actress and filmmaker Hélène Châtelain, feminist writers like Marie Claire Blais and Nawal El Saadawi, and popular culture icons like Maradona.⁵⁹ This juxtaposition of such different registers of images challenges the idea that the pandemic years put life on pause, like some of the more personal scenes in the film suggests: walks in the park, video calls, and domestic activities. The pandemic years were not immobile, but marked by exacerbated socio-economic disparities, resulting in a resurgence of social movements and political activism even within the constraints of the health crisis. Charf's collage documentary, with intertitles, has the formal quality of a *ciné-tract*, resembling the political documentary tradition of Third Cinema. Yet, the film is never didactic nor militant. It instead takes a poetic approach to a political viewpoint through the particular attention to visual associations. The technique of the collage moreover suggests solidarity between various contexts around the world, showing parallels between recent postcolonial protests and revolutions and the class- and race- based

⁵⁸ Nadine Ltaif migrated to Quebec at the end of the 1970s, fleeing the civil war in Lebanon. She is a poet who has meditated on the condition of exile and reworked Mediterranean mythology from a feminist perspective throughout her multilingual work since the publishing of her first collection of poems *Les métamorphoses d'Ishtar* in 1987 for Guernica Editions. She also worked with filmmaker Michka Säl on the film *L'arbre qui dort rêve à ses racines* (1991), a documentary that centers the friendship between Nadine - a Lebanese exile- and Michka - a Jewish immigrant from Tunisia.

⁵⁹ Moufida Tatli is one of the most studied filmmakers within the field of transnational feminist studies with her film *The Silences of the Palace*. Hélène Châtelain is usually remembered as the main actress in Chris Marker's *La jetée*, but she also wrote and directed several documentaries. Marie-Claire Blais is a renowned feminist writer in Quebec, who contributed to the famous theatre play *La Nef des sorcières*, a staple in feminist francophone culture. Nawal El Saada is an Egyptian feminist activist and writer, committed in the analysis of women's conditions in Arab culture and Islam.

social movements in the Global North. In this respect, Charf's most recent film constitutes an entry point to consider the minor transnationalism of her cinema, situated within a political filmmaking tradition and whose conditions of production and distribution are determined by Charf's position as an immigrant filmmaker working in Quebec.

Charf deliberately embraces independent and artisanal means of production, which situates her filmmaking practices within a minor cinema tradition, intended as a political formation that critiques, directly or indirectly, hegemonic systems and representations of cultural power and identity. At least three minor cinematic traditions can be seen in Charf's filmography: European political cinema, such as Godard and Marker's; post-third-worldist cinematic aesthetics explored by women filmmakers, such as Asma El Bakry and Atteyat El Abnoudy;⁶⁰ and Quebec cinema's blurred boundaries between fiction and documentary. Combining, paying tribute, and reworking these cinematic traditions, throughout her production, Charf simultaneously imagines new postcolonial geographies within the francophone space and moves to critique the identity-based sovereignist project of Quebec. Charf herself situates her cinema as a critical intervention within the context of Quebec film culture:

Pour revenir au Québec, c'est vrai que le cinéma était une forme d'expression de l'identité importante, pour chercher un pays, mais [...] ce projet souverainiste a négligé les populations autochtones et éliminé les minorités [...] C'était presque inconscient. Il y a avait quelque chose au début: le projet souverainiste ne pouvait pas être porté que par des francophones blancs.⁶¹ (Charf 2022, interview with the author)

Charf's cinematic production can be divided into two main areas: short, experimental documentary videos circulated in art galleries, specialized women's film festivals, and art exhibitions; and medium- and feature-length documentaries with limited theatrical distribution in Quebec, but circulation in Paris and Tunisia, and within academic circles in women's studies programs across North America. In this eclectic artistic practice, Charf, from her own position as

⁶⁰ Egyptian filmmaker Asma El Bakry is mostly known for her feature film *Beggars and Noblemen* (1991) and for working as an assistant director for Youssef Chanine, but she directed several short and documentary films. Atteyat al-Abnoudy is also an Egyptian filmmaker, known for her three shorts documentary that rework an ethnographic filmmaking tradition from an anti-colonial perspective, focusing on precarious living condition of Egyptian peasants and working-class workers. The three short films are: *Horse of Mud* (1971), *Sad Song of Touha* (1972), and *The Sandwich* (1975). Both filmmakers belong to Third Cinema cinematic tradition (Van de Peer 2017, Desouki 2022).

⁶¹ "As for Quebec, it's true that cinema was an important form to express identity, to seek for a country, but this sovereignist project neglected Indigenous populations and minorities. It was almost an unconscious process. There was something at the beginning: the sovereignist project could only be carried on by white francophones." (Author's translation)

a Tunisian woman of Muslim culture established in Quebec explores constructions of femininity that challenge white-dominated constructions of Muslim women; comments on social issues affecting Arabic women and refuses to comply with a Western feminist patronizing standpoint; critically addresses the discourse of Quebec interculturalism; and envisions decentralized histories and geographies of francophone feminism.⁶²

Charf's short films examine the subject position of Arab-Muslim women in Global North, and the socio-economic disparities around the world. Mair Verthuy contextualise Charf's work, systematizing her short films into two main trilogies: "le différent et le semblable," including *La mélomane voilée* (2008), *La main de Fatma* (2008), and *Sur les traces de ma malediction* (2008); and "à propos du monde" including *Wonderful World* (2009), *Les vies transitoires* (2012) et *Un seul Dieu* (2012).⁶³ The first trilogy specifically addresses the embodied experience of Arab woman in the public space of the Global North, while maintaining her position of in-betweenness. All three shorts star Nadine Ltaif. In *La mélomane*, a veiled woman (Ltaif) wearing only a shirt listens to a record of Billie Holiday while she plays with her own body in front of a mirror, discovering the sensuality of her body and laughing. In *Sur les traces de ma malediction*, Ltaif travels by train from Montreal to New York to visit Ground Zero. Her trip is interpolated and violently juxtaposed with images of the Israeli-Palestinian war and a clip from 9/11 of a man falling from the World Trade Center. It suggests the global connections between the two events, which both highly impacted North American perceptions toward Arab people. The last short of this trilogy, *La main de Fatma*, follows a woman (again Ltaif) from behind wearing a double necklace with the hand of Fatma on her shoulders (Fig. 9). She wanders around the urban landscape of Montreal, drawing attention to the presence of Arab immigrants through Arabic graffiti around her. Playing over her walk are blatantly racist statements made by Quebec citizens during the public hearings of the Bouchard-Taylor commission. While this first trilogy is

⁶² Transnational feminism (Mohanty 1984, Alexander 2006) has analyzed the problematic paternalistic relationship that western feminist have established towards Third World women, and the construction of "Muslim women" in particular, usually seen as victims that need to be liberated. In the specific context of Quebec, the rights of Muslim women are continuously threatened, as demonstrated by the debates around reasonable accommodations that have often focused on the use of the veil. A first law, Bill 94 in March 2010 targeted in particular against the wearing of *niqab*, forbade face coverings within government and public institutions. Bill 21, promulgated in 2019, adopts the "laicity" discourse to *de facto* discriminate against racialized communities by banning the use of any religious symbols (hijabs, turbans, yarmulkes, and crosses) for people working in public institutions, such as teachers, lawyers, physicians, administrators in governmental offices.

⁶³ I found Verthuy's essay on Charf at the Cinémathèque Québécoise in a folder that collected press releases on the filmmaker.

particularly exemplary of Charf's commitment to defy Western-centric stereotypes of the "oppressed Muslim woman," the second trilogy provides a more broad commentary on the socio-economic disparities across the world. It uses an ironic *pastiche* of intertitles, graphics, poetry in classical Arabic, music from different periods and genres, and *cinéma-verité* sequences.⁶⁴ These trilogies have circulated in "minor" national and transnational circuits, such as: curated film programs of works by diasporic artists, for example, *La mélomane* was included in "Disorienting Diaspora"⁶⁵; within specialized film festivals, such as the Festival du Monde Arabe in Montreal and the International Festival "Cinema e Donne" (Cinema and Women) in Florence, Italy; and on Youtube and conserved on DVD at the Cinémathèque Québécoise.



Figure 9 Nadine Ltaif in *La main de Fatma*.

In addition to her short films, Charf made three feature documentaries that established her presence within international circuits of feminist film culture. The first, *Les Passeurs* (2002), won

⁶⁴ Other relevant shorts that demonstrate Charf's political commitment in tackling the specific conditions of Arab women are *Femmes lapidées* (2010) and *Le viol d'Iman Obeidi* (2011), characterized by a more direct denunciatory intent through intertitles and voice-over commentaries against patriarchal oppressive instrumentalizations of women's body. Moreover, *Les réfugiés du chemin Roxham* (2019), exhibited at the Art Fair at Cité internationale des arts in Paris, is a short animated film that denounces the violence of border control.

⁶⁵ This short was included in the mixtape *Disorienting Diaspora*, a travelling program of videos put together by the collective Taklif drawing on the Queer Media Database Canada-Quebec. The collectif Taklif is an artist-run initiative dedicated to "learning, unlearning, and relearning practices through art and dialogue" and particularly committed to counter Islamophobic discourses in Canada through art initiatives and exhibitions. The program *Disorienting Diaspora* "brings together work by Brown diasporic artists who elude the logic of either/or in favour of unbelonging." (School of the Art Institute of Chicago, "Disorienting Diasporas"). The program was exhibited at RIDM 2018 and at the School of Art Institute of Chicago in 2019.

the Seal of Peace at the renowned feminist film festival Cinema & Donne in Italy.⁶⁶ In *Les Passeurs*, Charf interrogates the construction of identity in Quebec, reworking and challenging the notion of the two solitudes, and exploring instead the multiple ethnicities that constitute the city of Montreal. This quest into the cultural tissue of Montreal is an homage to Quebec's cinematic tradition that, since the advent of direct cinema, has explored the boundaries between documentary and fiction. The film is structured around the fictional journey of the protagonist Ulysses and his friends along boulevard St. Laurent—also called “La maine”—one of Montreal's major commercial arteries. They want to make a film, documenting the people they encounter on their walk. These 21st-century *flâneurs* interview the diverse people on the street, who boldly tell their stories of displacement and interrogate their hybrid identities in the documentary sequences. St. Laurent historically separated eastern francophone and Western Anglophone Montreal. The film reimagines this urban space as no longer defined by the opposition of two fixed identities. Indeed, the multiethnic encounters transform the spatial function of St Laurent: from a border, it becomes the open space of the borderland in which dominant identity groups and colonial histories are questioned and opposed by diasporic, indigenous, and hybrid identities. The curiosity of Ulysses and his friends in talking to and learning from the people they encounter reworks notions of a fixed identity in favour of what Martinican philosopher Édouard Glissant has defined “une identité racine rhizome”, a rhizomatic identity that moves towards the other to apprehend them in their difference (1996, 60).

Charf moves away from a simple opposition between francophone and Anglophone identities, and in *Les Passeurs* explores instead Quebec multiethnic identity and thus rewrites dominant narratives of constructions of identity in Quebec. Throughout the film, estranging close-up shots of video cameras and other recording technologies reference Quebec direct cinema, openly referring to the direct cinema masterpiece *Le Chat dans le sac* (Gilles Groulx, 1964). Early in the film, Ulysses and his friends go to wake their friend Barbara and re-enact the famous breakfast scene from Groulx's film. Barbara Ulrich herself, an actress in Groulx's film, appears in *Les Passeurs* to comment on the historical divisions of identity and discuss her earlier film. In *Le chat dans le sac*, a film about the metaphor of the immaturity of Quebec political identity, Jewish and anglophone Barbara quintessentially represents alterity to the *pure laine*

⁶⁶ The film was *ex-quo* with *Inch 'Allah Dimanche* (Yamina Benguigui, 2001). The fact that Charf is good friend with the organizers of the women's film festival in Florence, Paola Paoli and Maresa d'Arcangelo, further demonstrates her connection within a transnational network of feminist film culture.

masculine protagonist Claude (Claude Godbout). Claude's intellectual posture and political engagement is emblematic of a generation of French-Canadians that in the 1960s attempted to define the nationalist project and fight for Quebec independence. Within the very masculinist project of nation-building, the disinterest for political engagement in Groulx's film is embodied in the figure of Barbara, an Anglophone woman. With Ulrich's appearance, Charf, on the one hand, pays a cinephilic homage to direct cinema and inscribes her own film within a Quebec cinematic tradition that explored the definition of national identity. On the other, Barbara's emblematic alterity in Quebec cinematic imagination is rewritten by the actress herself that lucidly comments on the historical context of the film. In her review of the film, Janis Pallister wrote:

Charf presents the beauty of Quebec's multi-ethnicity, while also showing us through poetry, music, and conversations about the vicissitudes of life the attitudes of people as disparate as possible (Egyptian, Innu, Jewish, Haitian, etc.), yet having in common their Canadian citizenship and the French language, the tool of their daily existence. Not overlooked are the difficulties of the *Quebecois* "pure laine" in assessing their own culture, and in accepting the new immigrant population. Also touched on is the isolation often felt by Quebec's francophone majority. (Pallister 2006, 1122)

Pallister's tactful assessment of the film was published in *The French Review*, the official journal of the American Association of Teachers of French, and demonstrates the interest in Charf's film within North American university French programs. Indeed, Pallister starts her review with, "Instructors interested in demonstrating the diversity of contemporary Quebec society have only to obtain *Les Passeurs*" (1122), which speaks both to a largely accepted perception of Quebec as an exceptional francophone enclave in North America and at the same time to how Charf's film can be used as a springboard to address the impact of transnational flows of people, and the fraught relationships they engender. *Les Passeurs* provides a critique of the binary cultural identity considered the natural substrata of Canada and Quebec by focusing on decentered identities that are open to a politics of transformation and are formed through the act of walking and encountering people.

In *Autour de Mair* (2016) and *Béatrice, un siècle* (2018), Charf maps out transnational histories of feminist literary studies through a geography that decenters francophone feminism. The documentaries respectively focus on two important figures of francophone feminism, Mair Verthuy, co-founder of the Institute Simone de Beauvoir at Concordia, and Beatrice Slama, a

Jewish Tunisian professor of women literature in France. The two documentaries foreground their work as university professors committed to expanding the literary canon to include postcolonial, women's, and feminist writing, and their political involvement in feminist movements and support for anti-colonial struggles for independence. The documentaries do not situate Verthuy and Slama as exceptional individuals. Instead their trajectories become a pretext to illuminate a larger history of cultural and political feminism across disciplinary and geopolitical contexts, and their connections to and friendships with other intellectuals. In this respect, Charf not only highlights the historical importance that Verthuy and Slama had in institutionalizing women's literary work in university curricula, but also brings out the key role that women play in recognizing, discovering, and validating other women's work.

In *Autour de Maïr* (2016), the pioneering role that Maïr Verthuy, a Welsh-born Professor of French Studies, had in the establishment of courses on French, Québécoises, and Francophone women writers and in the foundation of Concordia University's Simone de Beauvoir Institut in 1978 constitutes the central thread around which the larger history of francophone feminism is explored. The documentary is mostly made up of frontal medium-shots interviews with different generations of feminist scholars (such as Arpi Hamalian, Lucie Lequine, Francoise Naudillon, and Martine Delvaux) and writers that read or comment upon excerpts from novels, poems, and essays (such as Madaleine Gagnon and Hélène Monette). Together, these sequences provide an extensive picture of francophone feminism, foregrounding voices and perspectives that have barely, or only recently, entered the canon. Often these sequences, shot in professors' office or at the National Library in Quebec, are interpolated with intertitles of quotes from literary works or contextual information on historical and political events, or interrupted by poetic interludes of wintry landscapes and the songs of Anne Sylvestre. The snapshot provided on francophone feminist interventions in literary studies and the reconstruction of how these became object of advanced studies and teaching prompt the occasion to tackle broader socio-political national and transnational issues. For example, at the center of discussions between Charf and Mair is the relationship between the use of English and French languages in Montreal, and Charf directly prompts Algerian feminist and former UNESCO lawyer Wassyla Tamzali to discuss the relations between Western feminism and "féminisme arabe."

If in *Autour de Maïr* we only briefly have access to Mair's more personal history, in *Beatrice un siècle* continuously oscillates between intimate history, and the reconstruction of a

feminist transcultural and interdisciplinary history. Beatrice Slama's, called Bice, personal story is marked by forced migration and teaching experience, and retraces postcolonial relations between Tunisia and France, the history of anticolonial struggles, and the political fervor of May '68 in Paris. Throughout the documentary, Charf pays a larger cinematic tribute to political cinema—particularly Godard's—demonstrated in the jumpcuts during interviews with Slama, and the black writing against a red background. This is emphasized further in the images of and quotes by Omar Diop (a West African anti-colonial revolutionary) and Anne Wiazemsky, who both were in Godard's *La Chinoise*. Moreover, when reconstructing the context of May '68, Charf uses archival documentary clips of the debates held at the "États Généraux du Cinéma," (General States of Cinema), a strike organized by the students of the IDHEC (Institut des hautes études cinématographique, or the Institute for Advanced Cinematographic Studies) during which filmmakers, technicians, and film critics met to discuss the possibility of making cinema according to Marxist politics.

Beside these references, in *Beatrice un siècle* we can distinguish three different types of images. First are close frontal shots of the protagonist Beatrice Slama that discreetly and respectfully expose her old body. They are employed when Slama reads literary excerpts or speaks about herself and her story. Other close shots reveal Slama's simple mundane gestures, from adjusting her hair to wandering alone in her big house to arranging flowers in a vase, and call attention to her bodily reality. The second order of images is made of archival photos from either Slama's personal collection of family photos and of her youth, or photos showing political events in Tunisia, with a particular focus on the Tunisian independence movement (1952–56). Other archival materials punctuate the film: journals, posters, and zines of May '68 are often superimposed with explanatory descriptions. But these materials are also used performatively: sometimes, Beatrice's memories and stories stem from her interactions with these materials, including photos, flyers, books, and lecture notes.

The last group of images are film excerpts that constitute a counter-archive of postcolonial and female-centered film history. The first clip is from *Zhora* (1922), the first fiction film shot and produced in Tunisia, directed by Tunisian Jewish Albert Samama-Chikly and written by his daughter Haydée (Mejri, 2019). The film tells the story of a French white woman shipwrecked and rescued by the members of a Beduin tribe, who comfort and protect the woman, dressing her in their garb. The film clip speaks to the encounters among different cultures that has

characterized the history of Tunisia. In the clip, women of the Beduin tribe take care of Zhora, dressing and making her up. Over the clip from the film, Slama talks about the decision of her family to leave Tunisia in 1965 following the expropriation of Jewish people in Tunisia which, since the Independence in 1956 and under the lead of Habib Bourguiba, first president of Tunisia, had intensified in the 1960s. The clip from *Zhora* is preceded by a superimposition of photos of Slama's son and daughter and an excerpt from her journal where she expressed her nostalgic feeling for Tunis, where she had started her teaching career first at the college Aloui and then at the Université de Tunis and she had now to leave: "tout a été pour moi bonheur: les étudiants, l'enseignement, la recherche, les collègues." Thus, the clip from *Zhora* seems to respond by contrast to Slama's nostalgia, underlying an utopic moment where peaceful coexistence of different ethnicities in Tunisia was imagined as possible.

Towards the end of the film, excerpts from Lois Webber's *Hypocrities* (1915) and Alice Guy's *Le resultat du feminisme* (1906) punctuate Bice's commentary and interpretation of Simone de Beauvoir's *Les Mandarins* and Colette's literary work.⁶⁷ The weaving together of these feminist cultural references, in a explicit discussion of sexuality, mirror the project of women's studies and feminist approaches to film and literary studies, to which Slama contributed through her teaching, to recuperate and validate women's contribution to art and literature. In this respect, Charf's film resembles an atlas of feminist histories. Especially by addressing transnational feminist histories and cultures within the postcolonial francophone context, Charf expands a francophone feminist discourse in Quebec that had mostly exclusively been informed by the narrative of Quebec's national oppression. Moreover, it explicitly addresses the context of interculturalism in Quebec from an original perspective that is at the same time optimistic in regards to the possibility of facilitating racial, ethnic, and cultural encounters, while remaining critical of the imposition of integration through intercultural policies.

Maryanne Zéhil: Re-Negotiations of the Lebanese Diaspora's Trauma

La face cachée du baklava is Lebanese-born filmmaker Maryanne Zéhil's most recent film. The film was presented at the festival Cinémania in 2020 and had (limited) theatrical release in Fall

⁶⁷ Webber's film was the first American non-pornographic film to include a frontal female nudity. Guy's film is an ironic sketch that presents the inversion of gender roles.

2021.⁶⁸ In the trailer of the film, the protagonist Houwayda (Claudia Ferri), a Lebanese woman settled in Quebec with a PhD in literature, asks her Québécois husband Pierre (Jean-Nicolas Verrault): “Est-ce que j’ai l’air de quelqu’un issue de la diversité moi?” (Do I look like someone from visible minority?).⁶⁹ What we understand from the trailer is that Houwayada is a well-established first-generation Lebanese immigrant in Montreal, tired of her role as a supporting wife and interested in taking up again her academic career. Houwayada’s social universe is defined by her relationship to her sister Joelle (Raïa Haidar), representative of the flamboyant Lebanese community in Montreal whose traumatic diasporic trajectory caused by the Civil War seems is in the trailer alluded to only through jokes, and by her family in law of white Quebecers who keep mispronouncing her name. When watching the rest of the film, we understand that there is more about Houwayada than the humoristic treatment of the cultural clash between the Lebanese diasporic community and Quebec “white” society. This clash, in the trailer, is played out especially in terms of the opposition between traditional and supposedly progressive gender roles. In the film, Houwayada negotiates her position within a Quebec society that, apparently open to immigrant integration, still exercises an exoticizing gaze on ethnic and cultural diversity. At the same time, Houwayada expresses a sort of an internalized refusal to be essentialized as Lebanese and, most importantly, to be associated with the exuberance of her Lebanese family and friends, connotated by a preoccupation with food opulence and by hyper-feminized costumes and make up. The sentence “Est-ce que j’ai l’air de quelqu’un issue de la diversité moi?,” which indicates Houwayada’s fear to be offered a job just because of her status as a “visible minority,” is emblematic of a larger concern for first generation racialized immigrants to be essentialized to and tokenized for their racial and ethnic background. The film thus critiques, through humour and irony, contemporary Quebec society that manages diversity through tokenizing inclusion. While *La face cachée du baklava* distances itself from Zéhil’s precedent filmography for its comic register, it still constitutes an entry point to this filmmaker’s interest in exploring Lebanese diaspora’s cultural encounters in Montreal through female

⁶⁸ Cinemania is the festival of francophone films held in Montreal since 1995. The festival is dedicated to the promotion and the showcase of “francophone creativity” with films from several countries that have circulated within “the most important film festivals” - “Cannes, Venice, Toronto, Namur and Angoulême.” The festival’s role is to be “a launching pad for francophone films in Quebec,” thus helping local (in Montreal and in Quebec) theatrical distribution of the films presented at the festival. (Cinemania, “About the Festival”).

⁶⁹ Claudia Ferri, an actress with a multicultural background, is known in Quebec for playing with iron and humor second generations Italian-immigrants in Montreal in particular in *Mambo Italiano* (Émile Gaudreault, 2003) and in the sit-com *Ciao bella* (2004-2005), both written by Italo-Canadian queer author Steve Galluccio.

characters that provide a very gender-specific focus on the experience of a consciousness conflictingly attached and to the homeland, processing collective memory, and negotiating their position in the host society. Moreover, the fear of tokenization expressed by Houwayada, subtly, seems to allude, extradiagetically, to the issue of diversity and visibility in Quebec cinema, where only recently discourses and policies at the institutional levels have started to make space for special incentives to foster ethnic and racial diversity, often in an optic that does not take into account more embedded structural problems that limit access to filmmaking.⁷⁰ In this respect, *La face cachée du baklava* also constitutes an entry point to address larger shifts within the Quebec film industry and the position of Zéhil, as representative of diasporic female filmmakers, within it.



Figure 10 *La face cachée du Baklava*. Screenshot.

Among Zéhil's films made in Quebec, *La face cachée du baklava* is the only one that has received funding from Sodec and Telefilm Canada at the level of production, while these two

⁷⁰ Some of these shifts at the institutional levels are: at Telefilm Canada, the establishment of a Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, which in 2020 has recommended the creation of a Development Stream for Racialized people (Telefilm Canada, "Diversity and Inclusion Working Group – Presentation). The program data released in 2021 show that CAD 2.5M were invested in 143 projects from companies majority-owned and controlled by Racialized Persons and whose screenwriter and producer both self-identify as Racialized Persons (Telefilm Canada shares data for inaugural funding through the Development Stream for Racialized Persons, 2021). In 2021, the NFB announced its program to improve Equity, Diversity, Inclusion consisting in: the creation of new positions as the Director for EDI and the Director for relationships with Indigenous People; the improving of hiring processes with the decision that at least half of the new hires belong to Indigenous, black, racialized and LGBTQ2+ communities; a new programming that gives space to Indigenous, black, racialized, LGBTQ2+, and disabled creators; the establishment of an EDI committee which will project action plans with concrete measurable outcomes (CVTM, "L'Office national du film du Canada annonce ses objectifs et ses engagements en matière de diversité, d'équité et d'inclusion"). Interestingly, Sodec has not announced any official measure in terms of EDI in the audiovisual sector.

institutions had previously supported Zéhil's films only through tax credits.⁷¹ When I asked Zéhil about her relations to film funding agencies at the provincial and federal levels, during my interview with her in 2022, she replied:

Avant, je n'avais pas de rapport avec les institutions. Les portes étaient complètement fermées, il était pas possible. [...] Mais aujourd'hui, j'avoue que les choses ont beaucoup changé et on l'a vu que sans une volonté politique, aucun changement ne se fait. Donc il y a eu une volonté politique ces dernières années, suite au mouvement metoo au quel heureusement on a associé le mouvement aussi de la question de la diversité. Moi je le vois qu'il y a une différence, aujourd'hui je dirais que les relations sont très bonnes avec les deux institutions.⁷²

Zéhil thus notices a newly accrued interest in her work at an institutional level, depending on a larger cultural-political climate that has raised awareness on the mechanisms of exclusion in the film industry.⁷³

Notwithstanding Zéhil's material marginality from the main circuits of production in Quebec, Zéhil has managed to work with well-recognized actresses of Quebec cinema as Louise Portal and Pascale Boussiere, as well as with Arsinée Khanjian, one of the most famous Canadian actresses.⁷⁴ These collaborations, which stems from Zéhil's own initiative, attests to her mode of

⁷¹ Other federal and provincial agencies that have supported Zéhil's films are Conseil des arts du Canada and Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec. Moreover, Zéhil's films were financed by private funding such as Super Écran (a Canadian premium television network, belonging to Bell Media) and, in the case of her first film, *De ma maison sans fenêtre* (2006), in co-production with LBC International Lebanon (which is a private television station in Lebanon). Interestingly, *La vallée des larmes* (2012), a film that tackles humanitarian issues, received funding from the OIF (Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie).

⁷² "At the beginning, I didn't really have any relation with the institutions. Doors were completely closed, it was impossible. But today, I must admit that things have changed. We saw that without a political willingness, nothing happens. So, there has been a political willingness in the last few years especially after #metoo which has also opened to questions of diversity and inclusion. I can see that there is a difference and today, my relation to the institutions is pretty good." (Author's translation). Here, Zéhil is talking specifically about Sodec and Telefilm Canada.

⁷³ Furthermore, Zéhil also recognizes the necessary intervention at the level of film training that the institutions should do in order to actually guarantee a larger variety of access to the industry: "if institutions are now open to diversity, it doesn't mean that all of a sudden there are 10 good projects from diverse filmmakers that can be funded. It's important that these institutions make an intervention starting from film training" (Author's translation from original interview conducted in French). While during my interview in February 2022, Zéhil seemed pretty optimistic regarding the increased attention brought by the funding institutions to her work, in a more recent exchange of emails with me Zéhil has noticed a renewed reluctance to find financial support from Sodec and Telefilm Canada. This, I believe, confirms the lack of addressing a more structural effort to include and provide support to immigrant filmmakers on behalf of the institutions.

⁷⁴ Louise Portal is especially known for starring in Denis Arcand's *The Decline of the American Empire* (1986) and *The Barbarian Invasions* (2003). Pascale Boussière started her acting career in *Sonatine* (Micheline Lanctôt, 1984)

production situated within authorial independent cinema practices in Quebec cinema as well as to the cultural capital that she has built locally in Quebec. In this respect, Zéhil's filmmaking practices and approaches are well situated within the local mechanisms of Quebec film industry. The presence of famous actresses from the national film industry, in particular, is also a strategy to mark her films as "Quebec cinema" especially in the eyes of the local film audience. For example, speaking of her third feature, *L'autre côté de novembre* (2017), and her collaboration with Khanjian and Boussière, in an interview published in *Séquence La revue de cinéma*, a Montreal-based film magazine, Zéhil said:

En fait, je n'ai pas eu de financement ni de Téléfilm Canada, ni de la SODEC. Pour l'instant, mes films ne sont pas subventionnés. Mais il faut montrer que nous sommes après tout au Québec et que le film doit avoir un passeport ; cela va de soi. Le plus important, c'est aussi de montrer que les étrangers qui ont décidé de voir le Québec comme un deuxième patrie, disons même une nouvelle patrie, doivent montrer cette caractéristique. (Castiel 2017, online)⁷⁵

Hence, Zéhil, aware of her marginal position within the national film industry, consciously strives to be recognized as a filmmaker in full right participating to the local film industry in Quebec probably because her films foreground female characters that propose an oblique look at a Quebec society still bounded to a limiting understanding of national identity and culture. Often these characters in Zéhil's films, marked by a diasporic consciousness and dealing with the traumatic collective memory of the Lebanese Civil War, display multiple and fragmented perspectives that disrupt conventional coordinates of national time and space.⁷⁶

and has played, among other films, in *Emporte-moi* (Léa Pool, 1999), *La turbulence des fluides* (Manon Briand, 2001), and recently in *Bootlegger* (Caroline Monnet, 2021). Canadian-Armenian Arsinée Khanjian is mostly known for working with her husband, the filmmaker Atom Egoyan. For instance, she played in *Calendar* (1993).

⁷⁵ "Actually, I didn't receive any funding from Telefilm nor Sodec. For the moment, my films are not funded [by governmental agencies]. Yet, I need to show that my film is made in Quebec and it has to have a passport. The most important thing is that immigrants who chose Quebec as their new home, they need to show this characteristic" (Author's translation).

⁷⁶ The Lebanese Civil War (1975–90) is a conflict that, following the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the consequent displacement of Palestinians in Lebanon, saw the opposition of the right-wing Maronite Christians (historically constituting the elite class in Lebanon) and the left-wing nationalists, mostly allied with Sunni Muslims and with the PLO (the Palestine Liberation Organization). Historically structural socio-economic differences between the groups are at the basis of the conflict. The war caused a large Lebanese diaspora who mostly migrated in Europe (France) and North America. Historically, Montreal, along with New York, has always been one of the first destinations for Lebanese immigrants in North America. New waves of Lebanese immigrants in Montreal increased during the Civil War and continued throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. In Quebec, the Lebanese Civil War entered the public sphere especially thanks to the play *Incendies* by Wajdi Mouwrad adapted into film by Denis Villeneuve in 2010.

In Zéhil's films, the characters' relation to the traumatic period of Lebanese history is expressed through non-linear narratives, structured around flashbacks. This formal strategy underlies the diasporic condition always torn between nostalgia of the homeland—even when this attachment to home is not idyllic—and the desire and the struggle to fit in within the host society. Hence female subjectivity, in Zéhil's films, is articulated around the imbrication of trauma, collective memory, and interculturality. As in *La face cachée du baklava*, in *De ma fenêtre sans maison* (2006) and *L'autre cote de novembre* (2016), the protagonists are Lebanese women who invest the private and public spaces of the city of Montreal with new meanings linked to a transcultural resistance to gender expectations of Lebanese culture on the one hand, and to ethnic expectations in Quebec on the other. While all these films put forward individual narratives of displacement, the experience is mediated collectively through an often-complex interaction with the Lebanese diasporic community in Montreal, sometimes treated ironically. In *La vallée des larmes* (2012), instead, the protagonist is Marie (Nathalie Coupal) a Québécoise that is unexpectedly demanded to address the violent trauma following the massacre of Palestinians in Sabra and Shatila.⁷⁷

Zéhil's films are in conversation with a transnational imaginary created by female Lebanese filmmakers who work within francophone circuits of production and distribution. While a first generation of Lebanese female filmmakers, starting with Joceylene Saaba and Randa Chahal Sabbag, directly addressed the historical and socio-political causes and consequences of the Civil War conflict (Khatib 2006; White 2015; Richard 2020), a more recent generation, who came of age after the end of the civil war, including Nadine Labaki, Dima-El Horr, and even more recently Mounia Akl, displace an overt treatment of the legacy of the war in favour of narratives of female solidarity and friendship or of family dynamics within dystopic futures.⁷⁸ Zéhil's films are in conversation with both generations as far as, on the one hand, the

⁷⁷ During this massacre in 1982, Maronites militias, with the support of the Israeli Defence Forces, killed Palestinians and Lebanese Shiites civilians in a refugee's camp.

⁷⁸ Both Joceylene Saab (b. 1948) and Randa Chahal Sabbag (b. 1953) were activist documentary filmmakers committed to tell and inform about the Civil War. For example, they both recounted the origins of the Lebanese conflict respectively in *Lebanon in Turmoil* (1970) and *Pas à pas* (1978). Moreover, they also moved their political approach to filmmaking into fiction films. For example, *Civilisées* (Randa Chahal Sabbag, 1999) is a comedy that addresses social fragmentation of Lebanese society during the Civil War foregrounding the depiction of feminine characters of different socio-economic, cultural, and racial background. Saab's most famous fiction film is *Dunia Kiss Me not on the Eyes* (2005), which explores female sexuality and sensuality as well as female circumcision in Egypt. Nadine Labaki (b. 1974) came to international fame with *Caramel* (2007), a "chick-flick" (White 2015, 120) that takes place within the space of a beauty parlor where the stories of several women interweave. Labaki has since only realized two other fiction films, *Where Do We Go Now?* (2011) and *Capernaum* (2019), but she works as an

Civil War is, directly or indirectly, the cause of the diasporic conditions of the protagonists living in Quebec. On the other hand, the socio-political dimensions of the war are never directly addressed. The Civil War, in Zéhil's films, has only individual consequences on the personal life and relationships with family and friends of the protagonists. By privileging the diasporic experience of female characters always dimidiated culturally and socially between homeland and home, Zéhil makes an intervention in the formation of a collective imaginary of the Lebanese diaspora decentering the overt political trauma of displacement onto everyday aspects and relationships in the host society. Avoiding any direct stance in relation to the Lebanese civil conflict, Zéhil approaches the collective memory of the war through the perspective of female characters for whom the war was a background to their decision to leave Lebanon and redefine their gender role beyond traditional expectations of femininity.⁷⁹

At the same time, these characters consider themselves as more *Québécoises* than Lebanese, constantly negotiating between gender and ethnic stereotypes. Thus, Zéhil also makes an intervention within the imaginary of Quebec cinema through female characters that disrupt essentializing links between ethnicity and national belonging and perform their femininity negotiating between gender expectations of home and host society. Working within the mode of production of feature fiction filmmaking, Zéhil constructs subject positions for female characters that from their standpoint and experience as diasporic middle-class women affirm their otherness, bringing forward their own perspective on established structures, cultural norms, and gender relations in the host society. Most of the protagonists established in Quebec in Zéhil's films seem to abide to a Western-centric perspective of what constitutes gender progressive politics. Yet through their confrontations with other female characters that have maintained stronger links to

actress, too. Dima El-Horr (b. 1972), who studied at School of Art Institute of Chicago, made *Every Day is a Holiday* (2009), a film set in contemporary Bayreuth where three women travel together on a bus and traverse the desert to visit their husbands in prison. The films bring forward these women's trajectory of independence within a landscape that metonymically represent the immobility of a country battered by continuous political conflicts. Finally, Mounia Akl (b. 1982), MFA in Directing at Columbia University, has adopted an ecocritical perspective on contemporary social crises and consequent upheavals in Lebanon in her short *Submarine* (2016) and her feature *Costa Brava, Lebanon* (2021).

⁷⁹ Only *La vallée des larmes* more directly addresses the Civil War with reference to specific episode of the massacre in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila. Yet, the massacre is told more from a personal rather than political perspective. In this film, Marie, a Québécoise publisher, learns about the massacre by reading a memoir that she receives from one of the survivors. The film, thus, privileges a Western-centric perspective on the massacre through a character that is drawn to geopolitical events only by empathy. Moreover, the story of the massacre is told through the perspective of "maternal responsibility" (The Valley of Tears, "Interview"), showing that part of the cycle of revenge of the Lebanese Civil War is instigated by mothers. However, Zéhil's film contribute to the creation of a cultural memory of this specific episode of the war in Lebanon, showing its global impact via the trauma of the Lebanese diaspora.

Lebanese diasporic communities and culture—as in the case of the relationship between the two sisters Houwayda and Joelle in the above-discussed *La face cachée du baklava* or the mother/daughter relationship in *De ma fenêtre, Sans Maison*—they also put into question expectations of successful femininities in terms of professional affirmation and sexual liberation. In this respect, Zéhil acknowledges difference among women and the specificity of the female subject positions brought about by displacement and relocation.

Zéhil's first film is *De ma fenêtre, Sans Maison* (2006). In the film, Sana, played by Louise Portal, is a Lebanese woman who has left her country of origin and her daughter to live in Montreal. When Dounia (Renée Thomas), the young daughter, joins her mother in Montreal, a mother/daughter relationship unfolds, characterized by a difficult negotiation between different lifestyles and approaches to family traumas. The protagonist is firmly set in the urban context of Montreal and Quebec society, but she constantly has to justify and negotiate her to leave Lebanon both to the Lebanese diasporic community she interacts with in Montreal and to her Quebec friends and partner. The film is characterized by a minimalist style sometimes interrupted by dream-like sequences that mix superimposition and music to reflect the affective state of the protagonist and her fragmented experience of memory.



Figure 11 *De ma fenêtre sans maison*. Screenshot.

The conflict between Sana, the mother, fully integrated within the socio-cultural context of Montreal, and Dounia, the daughter, new in Montreal and still affectively linked to Lebanon, is the ground through which the film problematically opposes apparently progressive gender politics and sexual freedom in Quebec against traditional expectations of womanhood. In this respect, the film does not counter the liberal Quebec intercultural discourse emphasizes gender

equality as a core value of Quebec society and the basis of which immigrants must be integrated. However, the film does confront these female subjectivities' struggle at negotiating their conflicted nostalgic longing for the homeland and their adaptation efforts in the host society. Playing with some tropes of the Lebanese diasporic culture from the perspective of an insider especially through a dinner – a motif that is recurrent in Zéhil's films - where Sana has to juggle between the cultural expectations both of her extended network of Lebanese friends and of her few Quebecois friends, the film opens up a space for an estranging vision on both cultural identities, the Lebanese and the Québécoise.

While Houwayda and Sana are both well surrounded by the loud Lebanese diasporic community in Montreal (Fig. 10 and 11), the protagonist of *L'autre côté de Novembre* (2016), Leyla, is more isolated and finds herself grappling with her past, the trauma of displacement, and the fragmentation of memory. At the beginning of the film, right before the start of the Lebanese Civil War, two young friends, Layla (Raïa Haidar/Arsinée Khanjian) and Samira (Beatrice Moukhalber), make each other a promise: Layla promises that she would do everything to move to Canada to follow Samira, by enrolling into any university program. After this initial sequence, two alternative parallel narratives progress in the film, each taking place in two different spatial coordinates: Montreal and Maïn El Maten in Lebanon. In one version of the story, both Layla and Samira moved to Canada. The first becomes a neurosurgeon and the second disappears after several years of living in an abusive relationship with her husband from which Layla had tried to help her friend escape. In a second alternative, after Samira's suicide, Layla decides to remain in Lebanon, get married, and becomes a seamstress. Thus, the film presents with two different version of Leyla: in one, she is Léa, an established middle-class medical doctor surrounded by Quebecois friends and colleagues, including Dr. Bernard (Marc Labrèche) and Dre. Louise (Pascale Boussières). In this version of the story, Léa starts to be affected by memory issues and hallucination: the more she starts to recall the traumatic events that marked her life, the beginning of the war in Lebanon and the disappearance of her friend Samira in Montreal, the more she starts to lose short-term memory. She becomes obsessed with finding out what happened to Samira after she thinks she saw her again. Meanwhile, the memory of what they went through—in particular, Léa's attempt to help Samira escape the violence from her husband—continuously resurfaces interrupting Lea daily routine. By the end of the film, we find out that irreversible loss of memory is actually affecting Lea, which can be interpreted as a somatization of the trauma of

displacement, of adapting to a new context, of the impossibility to remain attached to a past that will, eventually and inevitably, fade away.

In the alternative version of the story, Leyla has remained in her village, maintained her name, and has managed to establish a solid, yet precarious, sewing business. She has to deal with the demanding requests of her clients from Beyrouth, and then she discovers that his son is having an affair with one of her young servants. Overwhelmed by this situation, Leyla starts to retrace in her memory the choices that brought her to remain in Lebanon and the sweet memory of her friend Samira. It is especially through objects, like the red scarf that Samira gave her, that Leyla's memory is activated. The same red scarf in the Montreal version of Leyla's story is lost. Leyla desperately looks for it as the only tangible evidence that would confirm her memory of her past. Samira's tragic fate, in both versions of the story, is instrumental to Leyla's trajectory. In this respect, the film posits female friendship and Leyla's and Samira's attempt at challenging patriarchal gender relations as central to development of the character of Leyla.

The female characters in Zéhil's films narrate the Lebanese diaspora in Montreal, and provide a gendered perspective to the tensions, frictions, and experience of displacement, thereby providing a minor perspective to the transnationalism of Quebec cinema. Moreover, the circulation and distribution of Zéhil's films foregrounds the minor transnationalism of her cinema: Zéhil films receive limited theatrical distribution within the Montreal art-house circuit of francophone theatres, they are often distributed in Lebanon, and then fill in the programming schedule of the television network Super Ecran (one of the major funding sources for the film). Moreover, instead of premiering at major international A-list film festivals—contrary to the case studies analysed in the previous chapter of this dissertation—Zéhil's films circulate within specialized film festivals, such as the Portland Oregon Women's Film Festivals and Cinémania, or within the regional networks of film festivals across Quebec (Les rendez-vous du cinéma Québécois, Sherbrook World Film Festival, and Festival du Nouveau Cinéma), North America (such as the Greenpoint Film Festival and the Calgary International Film Festival), the Arab World (the Fajr International Film Festival, the Beirut International Film Festival, the Cairo International Film Festival, and the Dubai International Film Festival), and Asia (the Shanghai International Film Festival).

Conclusion

Assih, Charf, and Zéhil are situated in between the context of the Quebec film industry and larger transnational network of francophone film culture. From their position as diasporic filmmakers they had to find their own strategies to work in Quebec, thus occupying a minor position both vis-à-vis the established circuits of film production, distribution, and exhibition in the province and of the transnational circuits that have increased the visibility of Quebec cinema in the twenty-first century. They rely on their diasporic position as postcolonial francophone subjects to permit the circulation of their films within specialized circuits. Moreover, during my conversations with them, I found out that overall, they remain fairly isolated within the film and media milieu of Quebec and still struggle to find a place within the established circuits of feminist film culture, from grassroots artist-run centres to professional organizations. For example, even though they are all members of *Réalisatrices Équitables*, all of them expressed some reservations regarding the possibility of becoming active participants as far as they have always felt to be tokenized as representative of diversity. While feminism is not necessarily a posture nor an approach that they deliberately take on, except for Hejer Charf, they all show throughout their filmography an interest in reflecting on gendered subject positions within diasporic context or transnational feminist culture. In this respect, their films expand and rework Quebec women's cinema addressing, responding to, and prompting new feminist frameworks that address racial and ethnic differences among women.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has demonstrated that novel feminist media practices and approaches to filmmaking in Quebec have transcended national theoretical and political frameworks of 1960s-1970s Quebec feminism-- and that in so doing, they have come to participate in the formation of a circuit of transnational feminism within the *francosphère*. By way of conclusion, I would like to offer two anecdotes that both, in opposing ways, engage with the findings of my research and can also be useful in the framing of future research directions.

Anecdote 1:

In May 2023, Montreal-based film director Monia Chokri presented her most recent film *Symple Comme Sylvain* (2023) at the 76th edition of the Cannes Film Festival.¹ Chokri began her filmic career as an actress in Quebec and France.² Upon transitioning to the role of filmmaker, she emerged as Cannes' Discovery director in 2019, with her first feature film *La femme de mon frère*. Titled *A Brother's Love* in English, the film premiered in the festival's *Un certain regard* section and from this position became the jury's *coup de coeur*. The film established Chokri as a global woman director, a figure that, according to Patricia White, is "increasingly coming into view within the current circulation of world cinema" (2015, 4), and one "navigating [...] institutional politics [while] making films that have a chance to travel and be seen" (2015, 5). Chokri has since brought forth another feature film, *Babysitter*, in 2022. Her developing corpus can now be defined as centring on female characters undergoing difficult situations, who also simultaneously attempt to navigate them as they define themselves within kinship relations that go beyond the heteronormative spectrum. In *La femme de mon frère*, for instance, Chokri expresses the flaws and the vulnerability of the millennial's precarious femininity while playing with the codes of romantic comedy. The film's protagonist Sophia (Anne-Elisabeth Bossé), a young woman lacking professional prospects after having just completed her PhD in philosophy, is extremely devoted to her brother (Patrick Hivon). When he begins to date her gynaecologist (Evelyne Brochu), Sophia becomes profoundly jealous. In *Babysitter*, Chokri instead plays with the codes of the *giallo* and the conventions of the "male gaze" to produce an extremely ironic

¹ The film will be distributed in theaters in Fall 2023.

² Among other films, Chokri appeared in Xavier Dolan's *Les amours imaginaires* ("Heartbeats", 2010), and in *On ment toujours à ceux qu'on aime* (Sandrine Dumas, 2019).

critique of toxic masculinity in the era of #metoo. Cédric (once again played by Patrick Hivon) is an engineer who loses his job after harassing a journalist on television. Meanwhile, his wife Nadine (played by Chokri herself) goes through a post-partum depression and finds herself fantasizing about the new babysitter hired to look after their child (Nadia Tereszkiewicz).

Beyond her filmwork, Chokri has constructed her public persona as an outspoken artist intent on elaborating a critique of abusive behaviours and power relations in the film industry. For example, on her social media outlets Chokri is quite open about sharing personal experiences of harassment. At Cannes 2023, Chokri introduced her film with a speech in which she recognized, in her privilege of being at Cannes, the responsibility to also use the festival as a platform to address the need for cultural changes within the film industry. Chokri's remarks implicitly spoke to the politics of Cannes and other global film festivals in the post-#metoo climate: ostensibly offering pledges of increased gender equality within the film industry will not be enough, if not accompanied by the understanding that a broader redefinition of gendered labour and power relations is what must occur for real change to take place.

Further, in her speech Chokri tackled and deconstructed the established and normalized notion of "genius": as a vehicle by which violent and abusive behaviours have historically been excused on film sets in the name of the superiority of "art." Opposing such an understanding of the concept, Chokri critiqued unethical working environments in the film industry and proposed a redefinition of the concept of genius itself, arguing that one can be a genius and make a masterpiece "while remaining good, kind, [and] attentive". Chokri continues:

Those who have power have the responsibility that people around them feel well. [...] Waiting, one day, to also make a masterpiece, I am happy because I, WE, made it with kindness, love, and respect. Surrounded by special friends, that make me a better person (CTVM.info, 2023).³

With these words, Chokri categorises filmmaking as a collaborative endeavour and pledges in her own career to maintain relations of love, care, and respect as the basis of a new ethic of work.

³ Here is an excerpt from Chokri's speech in French: "Et je me suis dit, pourquoi on ne redéfinirait pas notre idée de ce que l'on considère génial ? [...] Je pense que le génie, c'est de faire un chef-d'œuvre mais tout en étant quelqu'un de bon, de bienveillant, à l'écoute. [...] Ceux qui ont un certain pouvoir ont la responsabilité de faire en sorte que les gens autour d'eux se sentent bien. « En attendant un jour, moi-même, d'espérer le chef-d'œuvre avec mon travail, je suis heureuse de ce film parce que je, et surtout NOUS, l'avons fait dans la bienveillance, dans l'amour et le respect. Entourée des amis précieux, que j'admire, qui font de moi une meilleure personne" (CTVM.info, 2023).

Anecdote 2:

In May 2023, I returned to GIV's headquarters with Drs. Alanna Thain and Dayna McLeod to conduct new primary archival research for the organisation's longstanding summer "festival", *Vidéos de Femmes dans le Parc* (VFP). An open-air screening of a curated program of video-art, the event has taken place annually since 1991. As we were in the midst of an archival dig through ephemera and videocassettes of VFP, Petunia Alves, GIV's general director, informed us that the decades-old event was abruptly being cancelled. The Théâtre des Verdures at Parc La Fontaine, VFP's historical location, had decided to remove VFP 2023 from its seasonal programming. VFP is an established event in the Montreal art scene, eagerly awaited annually by feminist and queer communities. VFP is not only open-air film screening, but also a labour of love offered to the community by GIV. It is a major part of the organization's commitment to feminist community building through video, and successfully attracted year after year a mixture of GIV enthusiasts, artists, and new members of the public. This exclusion of VFP from the summer programming of Théâtre des Verdures speaks to the precarity of alternative feminist media (McLeod, Olibet, Thain forthcoming) even in cities like Montreal that are so ostensibly and self-consciously progressive and queer-friendly. Where global medias pay lip service to increased gender inclusivity without always producing tangible results, this incident demonstrates that local medias that stand up to dominant gendered power relations are in highly precarious positions and in danger of disappearing.

These two episodes are representative of multiple different contexts, tackled throughout this dissertation, through which contemporary feminist audiovisual practices emerge in and from Quebec. Chokri's speech, within the context of global art cinema, speaks to new discourses around female authorship and creativity, while drawing specific attention to labour conditions in the film industry. On the local level, GIV's renewed difficulties in organizing one of its most important events speak to both continuous commitment and continuous challenges in the spheres of feminist political work in alternative media. In the tension between their different scales, both anecdotes exist within their respective politics of location. The first, in the context of international A-list film festivals that increasingly endorse gender equality movements as a part of the burnishing of their progressive politics; the second, in the context of community-based

activist media that attempts to create political solidarity within a transnational feminist perspective. Chokri's contribution to feminist film discourse and GIV's efforts in feminist creation and screening both exemplify approaches to filmmaking and mediamaking that try to create economic and affective alternatives to neoliberal discourses of "women's empowerment" and "gender equality".

Throughout the various chapters of this dissertation, I have demonstrated that contemporary feminist media and filmmaking practices from Quebec are central in the formation of a transnational francophone circuit of feminism. Situated within the genealogy of Quebec women's cinema, the practices examined also attempt to go further in their attempted integrations of transnational and intersectional perspectives. With my own methodologies merging ethnographic approaches and archival research, I have herein analysed embodied and situated forms of transnational feminist film culture in Quebec. More specifically, my research on GIV and its use of streaming platforms for the distribution of feminist and queer video-art has been situated within the longer genealogy of the organization itself; specifically, in its collaborative and feminist approaches to technology and infrastructures that mean to bolster transnational feminist perspectives and anti-heteronormative affective relations (Chapter 1). My analysis of a new generation of Quebec female directors whose films successfully circulate in the spheres of prestigious international film festivals has demonstrated how much these directors have come to play a crucial role in the visibility of Quebec cinema, no longer confined to global peripheral status. While these filmmakers generally distance themselves from the feminist activism of the previous generation, they nonetheless remain vocal about gender inequity within the Quebec film industry. The films by these filmmakers centre female protagonists who challenge normative gender identities while offering a notion of Quebec identity that is flexible and open to exchange (Chapter 2). Finally, my research on postcolonial francophone female directors has shown that filmmakers from immigrant communities remain marginal in the context of Quebec cinema, still struggling to receive financial support from the institutions of Quebec cinema or to secure theatrical distribution of their films. In fact, postcolonial female directors are deserving of not only adequate but substantial support, as I have argued that their filmmaking practices pave the way for the renewal of feminist approaches to filmmaking in Quebec cinema (chapter 3). There is of course also a new cohort of Indigenous women filmmakers that includes Tracey Deer, Caroline Monnet, and Sonia Boileu-Bonspille, all of whom are actively contributing to counter-

dominant constructions of Quebec national identity from a gendered perspective while bringing forward the experience of Indigenous people. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to address the specificity of Indigenous media and film practices mostly being produced in English, such work does remain vital for inclusion in any discussion of feminist film interventions in contemporary Quebec.⁴

The two anecdotes shared here in conclusion of this project both point to the role that film festivals, of various scales and diversified scopes, may play going forward. This includes their ability to advance the work of women filmmakers and also to foster venues of solidarity, offering spaces for coming together and playing a role in the ability for marginalised communities to solidify. Broadly, international film festivals are often seen as barometers of social change in terms of gender equity in the film industry, and contribute to the circulation of discourses on gender and sexuality around global cinema. Within the networked circuit of film festivals (de Valck 2007; Iordanova and Rhyne 2009), specialized women's film festivals originally emerged across North America and Europe within the framework of the women's movement in the 1970s and the 1980s. These have, over decades, come to represent crucial hubs for the development of feminist film culture. Grown into a fully-fledged global phenomenon, women's film festivals remain powerful spaces for assisting with the emergence of contemporary forms of feminist activism. Indeed, each unique festival's politics of programming provides a piece of the constellation of competing definitions of women's rights and feminism. In Quebec and in the larger *francosphère*, new women's film festivals, established in the 21st century, are today contributing to emerging global imaginations of gender and sexualities. They are also becoming venues of transnational feminist solidarity in their own right. It will thus be a natural step from the confines of this project to move on to detailed study of women's film festivals *of le francophonie* as the next field of inquiry in my research.

⁴ Other scholars (Smith forthcoming) are currently analyzing the work of Indigenous filmmakers addressing in particular how the multilingualism in their films expands and challenge understanding of francophonie as a linguistic and cultural area.

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